LECTURES ON RHETORIC

PRACTICAL ENGLISH SERIES

LECTURES ON RHETORIC

BY

HUGH BLAIR, D.D.

CONDENSED BY

GRENVILLE KLEISER

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TO THE STUDENT

THE lectures on rhetoric by Dr. Hugh Blair are too well known to require an extended introduction. They are based largely upon the system of Aristotle, and have served as the groundwork for many modern textbooks on this subject. In their original form they are too long for the use of present-day students, but in the condensed style in which they are presented in this book it is believed they will prove highly beneficial and interesting.

GRENVILLE KLEISER

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CHAPTER I

TASTE

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TASTE

TASTE may be defined as "the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art." The first question that occurs concerning it is, whether it is to be considered as an internal sense, or as an exertion of reason. Reason is a very general term; but if we understand by it that power of the mind which in speculative matters discovers truth, and in practical matters judges of the fitness of means to an end, I apprehend the question may be easily answered. For nothing can be more clear than that taste is not resolvable into any such operation of reason. It is not merely through a discovery of the understanding, or a deduction of argument, that the mind receives pleasure from a beautiful prospect or a fine poem. Such objects often strike us intuitively, and make a strong impression, when we are unable to assign the reasons of our being pleased. They sometimes strike in the same manner the philosopher and the peasant; the boy and the man. Hence the faculty by which we relish such beauties seems more nearly allied to a feeling of sense than to a process of the understanding; and, accordingly, from an ex-

ternal sense it has borrowed its name; that sense by which we receive and distinguish the pleasures of food having, in several languages, given rise to the word "taste" in the metaphorical meaning under which we now consider it. However, as, in all subjects which regard the operations of the mind, the inaccurate use of words is to be carefully avoided, it must not be inferred from what I have said that reason is entirely excluded from the exertions of taste. Tho taste, beyond doubt, be ultimately founded on a certain natural and instinctive sensibility to beauty, yet reason, as I shall show hereafter, assists taste in many of its operations, and serves to enlarge its power.

Taste, in the sense in which I have explained it, is a faculty common in some degree to all men. Nothing that belongs to human nature is more general than the relish of beauty of one kind or another; of what is orderly, proportioned, grand, harmonious, new, or sprightly. In children the rudiments of taste discover themselves very early in a thousand instances; in their fondness for regular bodies, their admiration of pictures and statues, and imitations of all kinds; and their strong attachment to whatever is new or marvelous. The most ignorant peasants are delighted with ballads and tales, and are struck with the beautiful appearances of nature in the earth and heavens. Even in the deserts

of America, where human nature shows itself in its most uncultivated state, the savages have their ornaments of dress, their war and their death songs, their harangues, and their orators. We must therefore conclude the principles of taste to be deeply founded in the human mind. It is no less essential to man to have some discernment of beauty, than it is to possess the attributes of reason and of speech.

But altho none be wholly devoid of this faculty, yet the degrees in which it is possest are widely different. In some men only the feeble glimmerings of taste appear; the beauties which they relish are of the coarsest kind; and of these they have but a weak and confused impression; while in others taste rises to an acute discernment, and a lively enjoyment of the most refined beauties. In general, we may observe that in the powers and pleasures of taste there is a more remarkable inequality among men than is usually found in point of common sense, reason, and judgment. The constitution of our nature in this, as in all other respects, discovers admirable wisdom. In the distribution of those talents which are necessary for man's well-being, Nature has made less distinction among her children. But in the distribution of those which belong only to the ornamental part of life, she has bestowed her favors with more frugality. She has both sown the seeds more

sparingly, and rendered a higher culture requisite for bringing them to perfection.

This inequality of taste among men is owing, without doubt, in part, to the different frame of their natures; to nicer organs, and finer internal powers, with which some are endowed beyond others. But, if it be owing in part to nature, it is owing to education and culture still more. The illustration of this leads to my next remark on this subject, that taste is a most improvable faculty, if there be any such in human nature; a remark which gives great encouragement to such a course of study as we are now proposing to pursue. Of the truth of this assertion we may easily be convinced by only reflecting on that immense superiority which education and improvement give to civilized above barbarous nations in refinement of taste; and on the superiority which they give in the same nation to those who have studied the liberal arts above the rude and untaught vulgar. The difference is so great that there is perhaps no one particular in which these two classes of men are so far removed from each other as in respect of the powers and the pleasures of taste: and assuredly for this difference no other general cause can be assigned, but culture and education. I shall now proceed to show what the means are, by which taste becomes so remarkably susceptible of cultivation and progress.

Reflect first upon that great law of our nature, that exercise is the chief source of improvement in all our faculties. This holds both in our bodily and in our mental powers. It holds even in our external senses; altho these be less the subject of cultivation than any of our other faculties. We see how acute the senses become in persons whose trade or business leads to nice exertions of them. Touch, for instance, becomes infinitely more exquisite in men whose employment requires them to examine the polish of bodies, than it is in others. They who deal in microscopical observations, or are accustomed to engrave on precious stones, acquire surprizing accuracy of sight in discerning the minutest objects; and practise in attending to different flavors and tastes of liquors, wonderfully improves the power of distinguishing them and of tracing their composition. Placing internal taste, therefore, on the footing of a simple sense, it can not be doubted that frequent exercise, and curious attention to its proper objects, must greatly heighten its power. Of this we have one clear proof in that part of taste which is called an ear for music. Experience every day shows that nothing is more improvable. Only the simplest and plainest compositions are relished at first; use and practise extend our pleasure, teach us to relish finer melody, and by degrees enable us to enter into the intricate and com-

pounded pleasures of harmony. So an eye for the beauties of painting is never all at once acquired. It is gradually formed by being conversant among pictures and studying the works of the best masters.

Precisely in the same manner, with respect to the beauty of composition and discourse, attention to the most approved models, study of the best authors, comparisons of lower and higher degrees of the same beauties, operate toward the refinement of taste. When one is only beginning his acquaintance with works of genius, the sentiment which attends them is obscure and confused. He can not point out the several excellences or blemishes of a performance which he peruses; he is at a loss on what to rest his judgment; all that can be expected is that he should tell in general whether he be pleased or not. But allow him more experience in works of this kind, and his taste becomes by degrees more exact and enlightened. He begins to perceive not only the character of the whole, but the beauties and defects of each part, and is able to describe the peculiar qualities which he praises or blames. The mist is dissipated which seemed formerly to hang over the object, and he can at length pronounce firmly, and without hesitation, concerning it. Thus in taste, considered as mere sensibility, exercise opens a great source of improvement.

But altho taste be ultimately founded on

sensibility, it must not be considered as instinctive sensibility alone. Reason and good sense, as I before hinted, have so extensive an influence on all the operations and decisions of taste that a thorough good taste may well be considered as a power compounded of natural sensibility to beauty and of improved understanding. In order to be satisfied of this, let us observe that the greater part of the productions of genius are no other than imitations of nature; representations of the characters, actions, or manners of men. The pleasure we receive from such imitations or representations is founded on mere taste: but to judge whether they be properly executed, belongs to the understanding, which compares the copy with the original.

In reading, for instance, such a poem as the Æneid, a great part of our pleasure arises from the plan or story being well conducted, and all the parts joined together with probability and due connection; from the characters being taken from nature, the sentiments being suited to the characters, and the style to the sentiments. The pleasure which arises from a poem so conducted, is felt or enjoyed by taste as an internal sense; but the discovery of this conduct in the poem is owing to reason, and the more that reason enables us to discover such propriety in the conduct, the greater will be our pleasure. We are pleased, through our natural sense of

beauty. Reason shows us how, and upon what grounds, we are pleased. Wherever in works of taste any resemblance to nature is aimed at, wherever there is any reference of parts to a whole, or of means to an end, as there is indeed in almost every writing and discourse, there the understanding must always have a great part to act.

Here, then, is a wide field for reason's exerting its powers in relation to the objects of taste, particularly with respect to composition and words of genius, and hence arises a second and a very considerable source of the improvement of taste, from the application of reason and good sense to such productions of genius. Spurious beauties, such as unnatural characters, forced sentiments, affected style, may please for a little; but they please only because their opposition to nature and to good sense has not been examined or attended to. Once show how nature might have been more justly imitated or represented, how the writer might have managed his subject to greater advantage; the illusion will presently be dissipated, and these false beauties will please no more.

From these two sources, then, first, the frequent exercise of taste, and, next, the application of good sense and reason to the objects of taste, taste as a power of the mind receives its improvement. In its perfect state it is undoubtedly the result both of nature

and of art. It supposes our natural sense of beauty to be refined by frequent attention to the most beautiful objects, and at the same time to be guided and improved by the light of the understanding.

I must be allowed to add that as a sound head, so likewise a good heart, is a very material requisite to just taste. The moral beauties are not only in themselves superior to all others, but they exert an influence, either more near or more remote, on a great variety of other objects of taste. Wherever the affections, characters, or actions of men are concerned (and these certainly afford the noblest subjects to genius), there can be neither any just nor affecting description of them, nor any thorough feeling of the beauty of that description, without our possessing the virtuous affections. He whose heart is indelicate or hard, he who has no admiration of what is truly noble or praiseworthy, nor the proper sympathetic sense of what is soft and tender, must have a very imperfect relish of the highest beauties of eloquence and poetry.

The characters of taste when brought to its most improved state are all reducible to two, delicacy and correctness.

Delicacy of taste respects principally the perfection of that natural sensibility on which taste is founded. It implies those finer organs or powers which enable us to discover beauties that lie hid from a vulgar eye. One may have

strong sensibility, and yet be deficient in delicate taste. He may be deeply imprest by such beauties as he perceives, but he perceives only what is in some degree coarse, what is bold and palpable, while chaster and simpler ornaments escape his notice. In this state taste generally exists among rude and unrefined nations. But a person of delicate taste both feels strongly, and feels accurately. He sees distinctions and differences where others see none; the most latent beauty does not escape him, and he is sensible of the smallest blemish. Delicacy of taste is judged of by the same marks that we use in judging of the delicacy of an external sense. As the goodness of the palate is not tried by strong flavors, but by a mixture of ingredients, where, notwithstanding the confusion, we remain sensible of each; in like manner delicacy of internal taste appears, by a quick and lively sensibility to its finest, most compounded, or most latent objects.

Correctness of taste respects chiefly the improvement which that faculty receives through its connection with the understanding. A man of correct taste is one who is never imposed on by counterfeit beauties, who carries always in his mind that standard of good sense which he employs in judging of everything. He estimates with propriety the comparative merit of the several beauties which he meets with in any work of genius,

refers them to their proper classes, assigns the principles, as far as they can be traced, whence their power of pleasing flows, and is pleased himself precisely in that degree in which he ought, and no more.

It is true that these two qualities of taste, delicacy and correctness, mutually imply each other. No taste can be exquisitely delicate without being correct, nor can be thoroughly correct without being delicate. But still a predominancy of one or other quality in the mixture is often visible. The power of delicacy is chiefly seen in discerning the true merit of a work; the power of correctness, in rejecting false pretensions to merit. Delicacy leans more to feeling, correctness more to reason and judgment. The former is more the gift of nature, the latter more the produce of culture and art. Among the ancient critics, Longinus possest most delicacy; Aristotle, most correctness. Among the moderns, Mr. Addison is a high example of delicate taste; Dean Swift, had he written on the subject of criticism, would perhaps have afforded the example of a correct one.

Having viewed taste in its most improved and perfect state, I come next to consider its deviations from that state, the fluctuations and changes to which it is liable; and to inquire whether, in the midst of these, there be any means of distinguishing a true from a corrupted taste. This brings us to the most

difficult part of our talk. For it must be acknowledged that no principle of the human mind is, in its operations, more fluctuating and capricious than taste. Its variations have been so great and frequent as to create a suspicion with some of its being merely arbitrary; grounded on no foundation, ascertainable by no standard, but wholly dependent on changing fancy; the consequence of which would be, that all studies or regular inquiries concerning the objects of taste were vain. In architecture, the Grecian models were long esteemed the most perfect. In succeeding ages the Gothic architecture alone prevailed, and afterward the Grecian taste revived in all its vigor, and engrossed the public admiration. In eloquence and poetry the Asiatics at no time relished anything but what was full of ornament, and splendid in a degree that we should denominate gaudy; while the Greeks admired only chaste and simple beauties, and despised the Asiatic ostentation. In our own country how many writings that were greatly extolled two or three centuries ago are now fallen into entire disrepute and oblivion? Without going back to remote instances, how very different is the taste of poetry which prevails in Great Britain now, from what prevailed there no longer ago than the reign of King Charles II., which the authors, too, of that time deemed an Augustan age; when nothing was in vogue but an af-

fected brilliancy of wit; when the simple majesty of Milton was overlooked, and "Paradise Lost" almost entirely unknown; when Cowley's labored and unnatural conceits were admired as the very quintessence of genius, Waller's gay sprightliness was mistaken for the tender spirit of Love poetry, and such writers as Suckling and Etheridge were held in esteem for dramatic composition.

The question is, what conclusion we are to form from such instances as these? Is there anything that can be called a standard of taste, by appealing to which we may distinguish between a good and a bad taste? Or is there in truth no such distinction, and are we to hold that, according to the proverb, there is no disputing of tastes, but that whatever pleases is right, for that reason that it does please? This is the question, and a very nice and subtile one it is, which we are now to discuss.

I begin by observing that if there be no such thing as any standard of taste, this consequence must immediately follow, that all tastes are equally good; a position, which tho it may pass unnoticed in slight matters and when we speak of the lesser differences among the tastes of men, yet when we apply it to the extremes, presently shows its absurdity. For is there any one who will seriously maintain that the taste of a Hottentot or a Laplander is as delicate and as correct

as that of a Longinus or an Addison; or that he can be charged with no defect or incapacity who thinks a common news-writer as excellent a historian as Tacitus? As it would be held downright extravagance to talk in this manner, we are led unavoidably to this conclusion, that there is some foundation for the preference of one man's taste to that of another, or that there is a good and a bad, a right and a wrong, in taste as in other things.

But to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary to observe next, that the diversity of tastes which prevails among mankind does not in every case infer corruption of taste, or oblige us to seek for some standard in order to determine who are in the right. The tastes of men may differ very considerably as to their object, and yet none of them be wrong. One man relishes poetry most; another takes pleasure in nothing but history. One prefers comedy; another, tragedy. One admires the simple; another, the ornamented style. The young are amused with gay and sprightly compositions. The elderly are more entertained with those of a graver cast. Some nations delight in bold pictures of manners, and strong representations of passion. Others incline to more correct and regular elegance both in description and sentiment. Tho all differ, yet all pitch upon some one beauty which peculiarly suits their turn of mind, and therefore no one has a title to

condemn the rest. It is not in matters of taste, as in questions of mere reason, where there is but one conclusion that can be true, and all the rest are erroneous. Truth, which is the object of reason, is one; beauty, which is the object of taste, is manifold. Taste therefore admits of latitude and diversity of objects, in sufficient consistency with goodness or justness of taste.

But then, to explain this matter thoroughly, I must observe further, that this admissible diversity of tastes can only have place where the objects of taste are different. Where it is with respect to the same object that men disagree, when one condemns that as ugly which another admires as highly beautiful; then it is no longer diversity, but direct opposition of taste that takes place; and therefore one must be in the right, and another in the wrong, unless that absurd paradox were allowed to hold that all tastes are equally good and true. One man prefers Vergil to Homer. Suppose that I, on the other hand, admire Homer more than Vergil. I have as yet no reason to say that our tastes are contradictory. The other person is most struck with the elegance and tenderness which are the characteristics of Vergil; I, with the simplicity and fire of Homer. As long as neither of us deny that both Homer and Vergil have great beauties, our difference falls within the compass of that diversity of tastes

which I have showed to be natural and allowable. But if the other man shall assert that Homer has no beauties whatever; that he holds him to be a dull and spiritless writer, and that he would as soon peruse any old legend of knight-errantry as the Iliad; then I exclaim that my antagonist either is void of all taste, or that his taste is corrupted in a miserable degree, and I appeal to whatever I think the standard of taste, to show him that he is in the wrong.

What that standard is, to which, in such opposition of tastes, we are obliged to have recourse, remains to be traced. A standard properly signifies that which is of such undoubted authority as to be the test of other things of the same kind. Thus, a standard weight or measure is that which is appointed by law to regulate all other measures and weights. Thus the court is said to be the standard of good breeding; and the Scripture, of theological truth.

When we say that nature is the standard of taste, we lay down a principle very true and just, as far as it can be applied. There is no doubt that in all cases where an imitation is intended of some object that exists in nature, as in representing human characters or actions, conformity to nature affords a full and distinct criterion of what is truly beautiful. Reason has in such cases full scope for exerting its authority, for a proving

or condemning, by comparing the copy with the original. But there are innumerable cases in which this rule can not be at all applied, and conformity to nature is an expression frequently used without any distinct or determinate meaning. We must therefore search for something that can be rendered more clear and precise, to be the standard of taste.

Taste, as I before explained it, is ultimately founded on an internal sense of beauty which is natural to men, and which, in its application to particular objects, is capable of being guided and enlightened by reason. Now, were there any one person who possest in full perfection all the powers of human nature, whose internal senses were in every instance exquisite and just, and whose reason was unerring and sure, the determination of such a person concerning beauty would, beyond doubt, be a perfect standard for the taste of all others. Wherever their taste differed from his, it could be imputed only to some imperfection in their natural powers. But as there is no such living standard, no one person to whom all mankind will allow such submission to be due, what is there of sufficient authority to be the standard of the various and opposite tastes of men? Most certainly there is nothing but the taste, as far as it can be gathered, of human nature. That which men concur the most in admiring

must be held to be beautiful. His taste must be esteemed just and true, which coincides with the general sentiments of men. In this standard we must rest. To the sense of mankind the ultimate appeal must ever lie, in all works of taste. If any one should maintain that sugar was bitter and tobacco was sweet, no reasoning could avail to prove it. The taste of such a person would infallibly be held to be diseased, merely because it differed so widely from the taste of the species to which he belongs. In like manner, with regard to the objects of sentiment or internal taste, the common feelings of men carry the same authority, and have a title to regulate the taste of every individual.

But have we then, it will be said, no other criterion of what is beautiful than the approbation of the majority? Must we collect the voices of others before we form any judgment for ourselves of what deserves applause in eloquence or poetry? By no means; there are principles of reason and sound judgment which can be applied to matters of taste as well as to the subjects of science and philosophy. He who admires or censures any work of genius, is always ready, if his taste be in any degree improved, to assign some reasons for his decision. He appeals to principles, and points out the grounds on which he proceeds. Taste is a sort of compound power, in which the light of the understanding al-

ways mingles, more or less, with the feelings of sentiment.

But, tho reason can carry us a certain length in judging concerning works of taste, it is not to be forgotten that the ultimate conclusions to which our reasonings lead refer at last to sense and perception. We may speculate and argue concerning propriety of conduct in a tragedy or an epic poem. Just reasonings on the subject will correct the caprice of unenlightened taste, and establish principles for judging of what deserves praise. But, at the same time, these reasonings appeal always, in the last resort, to feeling. The foundation upon which they rest, is what has been found from experience to please mankind universally. Upon this ground we prefer a simple and natural, to an artificial and affected style; a regular and well-connected story, to loose and scattered narratives; a catastrophe which is tender and pathetic, to one which leaves us unmoved. It is from consulting our own imagination and heart, and from attending to the feelings of others, that any principles are formed which acquire authority in matters of taste.

When we refer to the concurring sentiments of men as the ultimate test of what is to be accounted beautiful in the arts, this is to be always understood of men placed in such situations as are favorable to the proper exertions of taste. Every one must perceive

that among rude and uncivilized nations, and during the ages of ignorance and darkness, any loose notions that are entertained concerning such subjects carry no authority. In those states of society, taste has no materials on which to operate. It is either totally suppressed, or appears in its lowest and most imperfect form. We refer to the sentiments of mankind in polished and flourishing nations, when arts are cultivated and manners refined, when works of genius are subjected to free discussion, and taste is improved by science and philosophy.

Even among nations, at such a period of society, I admit that accidental causes may occasionally warp the proper operations of taste; sometimes the state of religion, sometimes the form of government, may for a while pervert it; a licentious court may introduce a taste for false ornaments and dissolute writings. The usage of one admired genius may procure approbation for his faults, and even render them fashionable. Some times envy may have power to bear down, for a little, productions of great merit; while popular humor, or party spirit, may, at other times, exalt to a high, tho short-lived, reputation what little deserved it. But tho such casual circumstances give the appearance of caprice to the judgments of taste, that appearance is easily corrected. In the course of time the genuine taste of human nature

never fails to disclose itself, and to gain the ascendent over any fantastic and corrupted modes of taste which may chance to have been introduced. These may have currency for a while, and mislead superficial judges, but being subjected to examination, by degrees they pass away, while that alone remains which is founded on sound reason and the native feelings of men.

I by no means pretend that there is any standard of taste to which, in every particular instance, we can resort for clear and immediate determination. Where, indeed, is such a standard to be found for deciding any of those great controversies in reason and philosophy, which perpetually divide mankind? In the present case there was plainly no occasion for any such strict and absolute provision to be made. In order to judge of what is morally good or evil, of what man ought, or ought not in duty to do, it was fit that the means of clear and precise determination should be afforded us. But to ascertain in every case with the utmost exactness what is beautiful or elegant, was not at all necessary to the happiness of man. And therefore some diversity in feeling was here allowed to take place, and room was left for discussion and debate concerning the degree of approbation to which any work of genius is entitled.

The conclusion, which it is sufficient for us to rest upon, is that taste is far from being an

arbitrary principle, which is subject to the fancy of every individual, and which admits of no criterion for determining whether it be false or true. Its foundation is the same in all human minds. It is built upon sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature, and which, in general, operate with the same uniformity as our other intellectual principles. When these sentiments are perverted by ignorance and prejudice, they are capable of being rectified by reason. Their sound and natural state is ultimately determined by comparing them with the general taste of mankind. Let men declaim as much as they please concerning the caprice and the uncertainty of taste. It is found, by experience, that there are beauties which, if they be displayed in a proper light, have power to command lasting and general admiration. In every composition, what interests the imagination and touches the heart, pleases all ages and all nations. There is a certain string, to which, when properly struck, the human heart is so made as to answer.

Hence the universal testimony which the most improved nations of the earth have conspired, throughout the long tract of ages, to give to some few works of genius; such as the Iliad of Homer and the Æneid of Vergil. Hence the authority which such works have acquired as standards, in some degree, of poetical composition; since from them we are

enabled to collect what the sense of mankind is, concerning those beauties which give them the highest pleasure, and which therefore poetry ought to exhibit. Authority or prejudice may, in one age or country, give a temporary reputation to an indifferent poet or a bad artist; but when foreigners, or when posterity, examine his works, his faults are discerned, and the genuine taste of human nature appears. Time overthrows the illusions of opinion, but establishes the decisions of nature.

CHAPTER II

STYLE—PERSPICUITY AND PRECISION

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It is not easy to give a precise idea of what is meant by Style. The best definition I can give of it is, "the peculiar manner in which a man expresses his conceptions by means of language." It is different from mere language or words. The words which an author employs may be proper and faultless; but his style may, nevertheless, have great faults; it may be dry, or stiff, or feeble, or affected. Style has always some reference to an author's manner of thinking. It is a picture of the ideas which rise in his mind, and of the manner in which they rise there; and, hence, when we are examining an author's composition, it is, in many cases, extremely difficult to separate the style from the sentiment. No wonder these two should be so intimately connected, as style is nothing else than that sort of expression which our thoughts most readily assume. Hence, different countries have been noted for peculiarities of style suited to their different temper and genius. The Eastern nations animated their style with the most strong and hyperbolical figures. The Athenians, a polished

and acute people, formed a style accurate, clear, and neat. The Asiatics, gay and loose in their manners, affected a style florid and diffuse. The like sort of characteristic differences are commonly remarked in the style of the French, the English, and the Spaniards. In giving the general characters of style, it is usual to talk of a nervous, a feeble, or a spirited style; which are plainly the characteristics of a writer's manner of thinking, as well as of expressing himself; so difficult it is to separate these two things from each other. Of the general characters of style, I am afterward to discourse; but it will be necessary to begin with examining the more simple qualities of it, from the assemblage of which its more complex denominations, in a great measure, result.

All the qualities of a good style may be ranged under two heads: perspicuity and ornament. For all that can possibly be required of language is, to convey our ideas clearly to the minds of others, and, at the same time, in such a dress as, by pleasing and interesting them, shall most effectually strengthen the impressions which we seek to make. When both these ends are answered, we certainly accomplish every purpose for which we use writing and discourse.

Perspicuity, it will be readily admitted, is the fundamental quality of style; a quality so essential in every kind of writing that for

the want of it nothing can atone. Without this, the richest ornaments of style only glimmer through the dark, and puzzle instead of please the reader. This, therefore, must be our first object, to make our meaning clearly and fully understood, and understood without the least difficulty. If we are obliged to follow a writer with much care, to pause, and to read over his sentences a second time, in order to comprehend them fully, he will never please us long. Mankind are too indolent to relish so much labor. They may pretend to admire the author's depth after they have discovered his meaning, but they will seldom be inclined to take up his work a second time.

Authors sometimes plead the difficulty of their subject as an excuse for the want of perspicuity. But the excuse can rarely, if ever, be admitted. For whatever a man conceives clearly, that, it is in his power, if he will be at the trouble, to put into distinct propositions, or to express clearly to others; and upon no subject ought any man to write where he can not think clearly. His ideas, indeed, may very excusably be on some subjects incomplete or inadequate, but still, as far as they go, they ought to be clear; and wherever this is the case, perspicuity, in expressing them, is always attainable. The insecurity which reigns so much among many metaphysical writers is, for the most part, owing to the indistinctness of their own con-

ceptions. They see the object but in a confused light, and, of course, can never exhibit it in a clear one to others.

Perspicuity in writing is not to be considered as merely a sort of negative virtue, or freedom from defect. It has higher merit: it is a degree of positive beauty. We are pleased with an author, we consider him as deserving praise, who frees us from all fatigue of searching for his meaning, who carries us through his subject without any embarrassment or confusion, whose style flows always like a limpid stream, where we see to the very bottom.

The study of perspicuity requires attention, first, to single words and phrases, and then to the construction of sentences. I begin with treating of the first, and shall confine myself to it in this lecture.

Perspicuity, considered with respect to words and phrases, requires these three qualities in them: purity, propriety, and precision.

Purity and propriety of language are often used indiscriminately for each other, and, indeed, they are very nearly allied. A distinction, however, obtains between them. Purity is the use of such words and such constructions as belong to the idiom of the language which we speak; in opposition to words and phrases that are imported from other languages, or that are obsolete, or new-coined, or used with-

out proper authority. Propriety is the selection of such words in the language as the best and most established usage had appropriated to those ideas which we intend to express by them. It implies the correct and happy application of them, according to that usage; in opposition to vulgarisms or low expressions, and to words and phrases which would be less significant of the ideas that we mean to convey. Style may be pure; that is, it may all be strictly English, without Scotticisms or Gallicisms, or ungrammatical, irregular expressions of any kind, and may, nevertheless, be deficient in propriety. The words may be ill chosen, not adapted to the subject, nor fully expressive of the author's sense. He has taken all his words and phrases from the general mass of English language; but he has made his selection among these words unhappily. Whereas, style can not be proper without being also pure; and where both purity and propriety meet, besides making style perspicuous, they also render it graceful. There is no standard, either of purity or of propriety, but the practise of the best writers and speakers in the country.

When I mentioned obsolete or new-coined words as incongruous with purity of style, it will be easily understood that some exceptions are to be made. On certain occasions they may have grace. Poetry admits of greater latitude than prose, with respect to coining

or, at least, new-compounding words; yet, even here, this liberty should be used with a sparing hand. In prose such innovations are more hazardous, and have a worse effect. They are apt to give style an affected and conceited air, and should never be ventured upon except by those whose established reputation gives them some degree of dictatorial power over language.

The introduction of foreign and learned words, unless where necessity requires them, should always be avoided. Barren languages may need such assistance, but ours is not one of these. Dean Swift, one of our most correct writers, valued himself much on using no words but such as were of native growth: and his language may, indeed, be considered as a standard of the strictest purity and propriety in the choice of words. At present we seem to be departing from this standard. A multitude of Latin words have, of late, been poured in upon us. On some occasions they give an appearance of elevation and dignity to style. But often, also, they render it stiff and forced.

Let us now consider the import of precision in language, which, as it is the highest part of the quality denoted by perspicuity, merits a full explication; and the more because distinct ideas are, perhaps, not commonly formed about it.

The exact import of precision may be drawn

from the etymology of the word. It comes from "precidere," to cut off. It imports retrenching all superfluities, and pruning the expression so as to exhibit neither more nor less than an exact copy of his idea who uses it. I observed before that it is often difficult to separate the qualities of style from the qualities of thought, and it is found so in this instance. For, in order to write with precision, tho this be properly a quality of style, one must possess a very considerable degree of distinctness and accuracy in his manner of thinking.

The words which a man uses to express his ideas may be faulty in three respects: they may either not express that idea which the author intends, but some other which only resembles, or is akin to it; or they may express that idea, but not quite fully and completely; or they may express it, together with something more than he intends. Precision stands opposed to all these three faults, but chiefly to the last. In an author's writing with propriety, his being free from the two former faults seems implied. The words which he uses are proper; that is, they express that idea which he intends, and they express it fully: but to be precise signifies that they express that idea and no more. There is nothing in his words which introduces any foreign idea, any superfluous, unseasonable accessory, so as to mix it con-

fusedly with the principal object and thereby to render our conception of that object loose and indistinct. This requires a writer to have, himself, a very clear apprehension of the object he means to present to us; to have laid fast hold of it in his mind; and never to waver in any one view he takes of it: a perfection to which, indeed, few writers attain.

The use and importance of precision may be deduced from the nature of the human mind. It never can view, clearly and distinctly, above one object at a time. If it must look at two or three together, especially objects among which there is resemblance or connection, it finds itself confused and embarrassed. It can not clearly perceive in what they agree, and in what they differ. Thus, were any object, suppose some animal, to be presented to me, of whose structure I wanted to form a distinct notion, I would desire all its trappings to be taken off, I would require it to be brought before me by itself, and to stand alone, that there might be nothing to distract my attention. The same is the case with words. If, when you would inform me of your meaning, you also tell me more than what conveys it; if you join foreign circumstances to the principal object; if, by unnecessarily varying the expression, you shift the point of view and make me see sometimes the object itself and sometimes another thing that is connected with it; you thereby oblige

me to look on several objects at once, and I lose sight of the principal. You load the animal you are showing me with so many trappings and collars, and bring so many of the same species before me, somewhat resembling, and yet somewhat differing, that I see none of them clearly.

This forms what is called a loose style, and is the proper opposite to precision. It generally arises from using a superfluity of words. Feeble writers employ a multitude of words to make themselves understood, as they think, more distinctly; and they only confound the reader. They are sensible of not having caught the precise expression to convey what they would signify; they do not, indeed, conceive their own meaning very precisely themselves; and therefore help it out as they can, by this and the other word, which may, as they suppose, supply the defect and bring you somewhat nearer to their idea. They are always going about it, and about it, but never just hit the thing. The image, as they set it before you, is always seen double, and no double image is distinct. When an author tells me of his hero's *courage* on the day of battle, the expression is precise, and I understand it fully. But if, from the desire of multiplying words, he will needs praise his *courage* and *fortitude;* at the moment he joins these words together, my idea begins to waver. He means to express

one quality more strongly, but he is, in truth, expressing two. *Courage* resists danger, *fortitude* supports pain. The occasion of exerting each of these qualities is different, and being led to think of both together, when only one of them should be in my view, my view is rendered unsteady, and my conception of the object indistinct.

From what I have said it appears that an author may, in a qualified sense, be perspicuous while yet he is far from being precise. He uses proper words, and proper arrangement; he gives you the idea as clear as he conceives it himself; and so far he is perspicuous: but the ideas are not very clear in his own mind; they are loose and general, and, therefore, can not be exprest with precision. All subjects do not equally require precision. It is sufficient, on many occasions, that we have a general view of the meaning. The subject, perhaps, is of the known and familiar kind, and we are in no hazard of mistaking the sense of the author, tho every word which he uses be not precise and exact.

Few authors, for instance, in the English language, are more clear and perspicuous, on the whole, than Archbishop Tillotson and Sir William Temple, yet neither of them are remarkable for precision. They are loose and diffuse, and accustomed to express their meaning by several words, which show you fully whereabouts it lies, rather than to single out

those expressions which would convey clearly the idea that they have in view and no more. Neither, indeed, is precision the prevailing character of Mr. Addison's style, altho he is not so deficient in this respect as the other two authors.

Lord Shaftesbury's faults, in point of precision, are much greater than Mr. Addison's, and the more unpardonable because he is a profest philosophical writer, who, as such, ought, above all things, to have studied precision. His style has both great beauties and great faults, and, on the whole, is by no means a safe model for imitation. Lord Shaftesbury was well acquainted with the power of words; those which he employs are generally proper and well founded; he has great variety of them; and his arrangement, as shall be afterward shown, is commonly beautiful. His defect, in precision, is not owing so much to indistinct or confused ideas, as to perpetual affectation. He is fond, to excess, of the pomp and parade of language; he is never satisfied with expressing anything clearly and simply; he must always give it the dress of state and majesty. Hence perpetual circumlocutions, and many words and phrases employed to describe somewhat, that would have been described much better by one of them. If he has occasion to mention any person or author, he very rarely mentions him by his proper name. In the treatise entitled "Advice to an

Author," he descants for two or three pages together upon Aristotle, without once naming him in any other way than the Master Critic, the Mighty Genius and Judge of Art, the Prince of Critics, the Grand Master of Art, and Consummate Philologist. In the same way, the Grand Poetic Sire, the Philosophical Patriarch, and his Disciple of Noble Birth, and lofty Genius, are the only names by which he condescends to distinguish Homer, Socrates, and Plato, in another passage of the same treatise. This method of distinguishing persons is extremely affected, but it is not so contrary to precision as the frequent circumlocutions he employs for all moral ideas; attentive, on every occasion, more to the pomp of language than to the clearness which he ought to have studied as a philosopher. The moral sense, for instance, after he had once defined it, was a clear term, but how vague becomes the idea when in the next page he calls it, "that natural affection and anticipating fancy which makes the sense of right and wrong." Self-examination, or reflection on our own conduct, is an idea conceived with ease, but when it is wrought into all the forms of "a man's dividing himself into two parties, becoming a self-dialogist, entering into partnership with himself, forming the dual number practically within himself," we hardly know what to make of it. On some occasions he so adorns, or, rather, loads with words,

the plainest and simplest propositions as, if not to obscure, at least to enfeeble them.

In the following paragraph, for example, of the "Inquiry Concerning Virtue," he means to show that by every ill action we hurt our mind as much as one who should swallow poison or give himself a wound, would hurt his body. Observe what a redundancy of words he pours forth: "Now, if the fabric of the mind or temper appeared to us such as it really is, if we saw it impossible to remove hence any one good or orderly affection, or to introduce any ill or disorderly one, without drawing on, in some degree, that dissolute state which, at its height, is confest to be so miserable, it would then, undoubtedly, be confest that since no ill, immoral, or unjust action can be committed without either a new inroad and breach on the temper and passions, or a further advancing of that execution already done; whoever did ill, or acted in prejudice of his integrity, goodnature, or worth, would, of necessity, act with greater cruelty toward himself than he who scrupled not to swallow what was poisonous, or who, with his own hands, should voluntarily mangle or wound his outward form or constitution, natural limbs or body." Here, to commit a bad action is, first, "to remove a good and orderly affection, and to introduce an ill or disorderly one"; next, it is "to commit an action that is ill, immoral and

unjust"; and in the next line it is "to do ill, or to act in prejudice of integrity, good-nature, and worth"; nay, so very simple a thing as a man's wounding himself is "to mangle, or wound, his outward form and constitution, his natural limbs or body." Such superfluity of words is disgustful to every reader of correct taste, and serves no purpose but to embarrass and perplex the sense.

The great source of a loose style, in opposition to precision, is the injudicious use of those words termed synonymous. They are called synonymous because they agree in expressing one principal idea, but, for the most part, if not always, they express it with some diversity in the circumstances. They are varied by some accessory idea which every word introduces, and which forms the distinction between them. Hardly, in any language, are there two words that convey precisely the same idea. A person thoroughly conversant in the propriety of the language will always be able to observe something that distinguishes them. As they are like different shades of the same color, an accurate writer can employ them to great advantage by using them so as to heighten and to finish the picture which he gives us. He supplies by one what was wanting in the other, to the force, or to the luster of the image which he means to exhibit. But he must be extremely atten-

tive to the choice which he makes of them. For the bulk of writers are very apt to confound them with each other, and to employ them carelessly, merely for the sake of filling up a period, or of rounding and diversifying the language, as if their signification were exactly the same, while, in truth, it is not. Hence a certain mist and indistinctness are unwarily thrown over style.

In our own language very many instances might be given of a difference in meaning among words reputed synonymous, and as the subject is of importance, I shall now point out some of these. The instances which I am to give may themselves be of use, and they will serve to show the necessity of attending, with care and strictness, to the exact import of words, if ever we would write with propriety or precision.

Austerity, severity, rigor. Austerity relates to the manner of living; severity, of thinking; rigor, of punishing. To austerity is opposed effeminacy; to severity, relaxation; to rigor, clemency. A hermit is austere in his life; a casuist, severe in his application of religion or law; a judge, rigorous in his sentences.

Custom, habit. Custom respects the action; habit, the actor. By custom we mean the frequent repetition of the same act; by habit, the effect which that repetition produces on the mind or body. By the custom of walking

often in the streets, one acquires a habit of idleness.

Surprized, astonished, amazed, confounded. I am surprized with what is new or unexpected; I am astonished at what is vast or great; I am amazed with what is incomprehensible; I am confounded by what is shocking or terrible.

Desist, renounce, quit, leave off. Each of these words implies some pursuit or object relinquished, but from different motives. We desist, from the difficulty of accomplishing. We renounce, on account of the disagreeableness of the object or pursuit. We quit, for the sake of some other thing which interests us more; and we leave off, because we are weary of the design. A politician desists from his designs when he finds they are impracticable; he renounces the court because he has been affronted by it; he quits ambition for study or retirement; and leaves off his attendance on the great as he becomes old and weary of it.

Pride, vanity. Pride makes us esteem ourselves; vanity makes us desire the esteem of others. It is just to say, as Dean Swift has done, that a man is too proud to be vain.

Haughtiness, disdain. Haughtiness is founded on the high opinion we entertain of ourselves; disdain, on the low opinion we have of others.

Distinguish, separate. We distinguish what

we want not to confound with another thing; we separate what we want to remove from it. Objects are distinguished from one another by their qualities. They are separated by the distance of time or place.

To weary, to fatigue. The continuance of the same thing wearies us; labor fatigues us. I am weary with standing; I am fatigued with walking. A suitor wearies us by his perseverance; fatigues us by his importunity.

Abhor, detest. To abhor, imports simply strong dislike; to detest imports also strong disapprobation. One abhors being in debt; he detests treachery.

Invent, discover. We invent things that are new; we discover what was before hidden. Galileo invented the telescope; Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood.

Only, alone. Only imports that there is no other of the same kind; alone imports being accompanied by no other. An only child is one who has neither brother nor sister; a child alone is one who is left by itself. There is a difference, therefore, in precise language, between these two phrases, "virtue only makes us happy," and "virtue alone makes us happy." "Virtue only makes us happy," imports that nothing else can do it. "Virtue alone makes us happy," imports that virtue by itself, or unaccompanied with other advantages, is sufficient to do it.

Entire, complete. A thing is entire, by

wanting none of its parts; complete, by wanting none of the appendages that belong to it. A man may have an entire house to himself, and yet not have one complete apartment.

Tranquillity, peace, calm. Tranquillity respects a situation free from trouble, considered in itself; peace, the same situation with respect to any causes that might interrupt it; calm, with regard to a disturbed situation going before or following it. A good man enjoys tranquillity in himself; peace, with others; and calm, after the storm.

Difficulty, obstacle. A difficulty embarrasses, an obstacle stops us. We remove the one, we surmount the other. Generally the first expresses somewhat arising from the nature and circumstances of the affair; the second, somewhat arising from a foreign cause. Philip found difficulty in managing the Athenians, from the nature of their dispositions, but the eloquence of Demosthenes was the greatest obstacle to his designs.

Wisdom, prudence. Wisdom leads us to speak and act what is most proper. Prudence prevents our speaking or acting improperly. A wise man employs the most proper means for success; a prudent man, the safest means for not being brought into danger.

Enough, sufficient. Enough relates to the quantity which one wishes to have of any thing. Sufficient relates to the use that is to be made of it. Hence, enough generally im-

ports a greater quantity than sufficient does. The covetous man never has enough, altho he has what is sufficient for nature.

Avow, acknowledge, confess. Each of these words imports the affirmation of a fact, but in very different circumstances. To avow supposes the person to glory in it; to acknowledge supposes a small degree of fault, which the acknowledgment compensates; to confess supposes a higher degree of crime. A patriot avows his opposition to a bad minister, and is applauded; a gentleman acknowledges his mistake, and is forgiven; a prisoner confesses the crime he is accused of, and is punished.

Remark, observe. We remark, in the way of attention, in order to remember; we observe, in the way of examination, in order to judge. A traveler remarks the most striking objects he sees; a general observes all the motions of his enemy.

Equivocal, ambiguous. An equivocal expression is one which has one sense open and designed to be understood, another sense concealed, and understood only by the person who uses it. An ambiguous expression is one which has apparently two senses, and leaves us at a loss which of them to give it. An equivocal expression is used with an intention to deceive; an ambiguous one, when it is used with design, is with an intention not to give full information. An honest man will never employ an equivocal expression; a confused

man may often utter ambiguous ones, without any design. I shall give only one instance more.

With, by. Both these particles express the connection between some instrument, or means of effecting an end, and the agent who employs it; but with expresses a more close and immediate connection; by, a more remote one. We kill a man with a sword, he dies by violence. The criminal is bound with ropes by the executioner. The proper distinction in the use of these particles is elegantly marked in a passage of Dr. Robertson's History of Scotland. When one of the old Scottish kings was making an inquiry into the tenure by which his nobles held their lands, they started up and drew their swords: "By these," said they, "we acquired our lands, and with these we will defend them." "By these we acquired our lands," signifies the more remote means of acquisition by force and martial deeds; and "with these we will defend them," signifies the immediate direct instrument, the sword, which they would employ in their defense.

These are instances of words in our language which, by careless writers, are apt to be employed as perfectly synonymous, and yet are not so. Their significations approach, but are not quite the same. The more the distinction in their meaning is attended to, the more clearly and forcibly shall we speak or write.

From all that has been said on this head it will now appear that, in order to write or speak with precision, two things are especially requisite: one, that an author's own ideas be clear and distinct; and the other, that he have an exact and full comprehension of the force of those words which he employs. Natural genius is here required, labor and attention still more. Dean Swift is one of the authors, in our language, most distinguished for precision of style. In his writings we seldom or never find vague expressions and synonymous words carelessly thrown together. His meaning is always clear and strongly marked.

I had occasion to observe before that tho all subjects of writing or discourse demand perspicuity, yet all do not require the same degree of that exact precision which I have endeavored to explain. It is, indeed, in every sort of writing a great beauty to have at least some measure of precision, in distinction from that loose profusion of words which imprints no clear idea on the reader's mind. But we must, at the same time, be on our guard lest too great a study of precision, especially in subjects where it is not strictly requisite, betray us into a dry and barren style; lest, from the desire of pruning too closely, we retrench all copiousness and ornament. Some degree of this failing may, perhaps, be remarked in Dean Swift's serious works. At-

tentive only to exhibit his ideas clear and exact, resting wholly on his sense and distinctness, he appears to reject, disdainfully, all embellishment, which, on some occasions, may be thought to render his manner somewhat hard and dry. To unite copiousness and precision, to be flowing and graceful, and, at the same time, correct and exact in the choice of every word, is, no doubt, one of the highest and most difficult attainments in writing. Some kinds of composition may require more of copiousness and ornament; others, more of precision and accuracy: nay, in the same composition, the different parts of it may demand a proper variation of manner. But we must study never to sacrifice, totally, any one of these qualities to the other; and, by a proper management, both of them may be made fully consistent, if our own ideas be precise, and our knowledge and stock of words be, at the same time, extensive.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES

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HAVING begun to treat of style, in the last lecture I considered its fundamental quality, perspicuity. What I have said of this relates chiefly to the choice of words. From words I proceed to sentences; and as, in all writing and discourse, the proper composition and structure of sentences is of the highest importance, I shall treat of this fully. Tho perspicuity be the general head under which I, at present, consider languages, I shall not confine myself to this quality alone in sentences, but shall inquire also what is requisite for their grace and beauty: that I may bring together, under one view, all that seems necessary to be attended to in the construction and arrangement of words in a sentence.

It is not easy to give an exact definition of a sentence, or period, further than as it always implies some one complete proposition or enunciation of thought. Aristotle's definition is, in the main, a good one: "A form of speech which has a beginning and an end within itself, and is of such a length as to be easily comprehended at once. This, how-

ever, admits of great latitude. For a sentence, or period, consists always of component parts, which are called its members; and as these members may be either few or many, and may be connected in several different ways, the same thought, or mental proposition, may often be either brought into one sentence, or split into two or three, without the material breach of any rule.

The first variety that occurs in the consideration of sentences, is the distinction of long and short ones. The precise length of sentences, as to the number of words, or the number of members, which may enter into them, can not be ascertained by any definite measure. At the same time, it is obvious, there may be an extreme on either side. Sentences, immoderately long, and consisting of too many members, always transgress some one or other of the rules which I shall mention soon, as necessary to be observed in every good sentence. In discourses that are to be spoken, regard must be had to the easiness of pronunciation, which is not consistent with too long periods. In compositions where pronunciation has no place, still, however, by using long periods too frequently, an author overloads the reader's ear, and fatigues his attention. For long periods require, evidently, more attention than short ones, in order to perceive clearly the connection of the several parts, and to take in the whole at one

view. At the same time there may be an excess in too many short sentences also; by which the sense is split and broken, the connection of thought weakened, and the memory burdened, by presenting to it a long succession of minute objects.

With regard to the length and construction of sentences, the French critics make a very just distinction of style, into *style periodique*, and *style coupé*. The *style periodique* is, where the sentences are composed of several members linked together and hanging upon one another, so that the sense of the whole is not brought out till the close. This is the most pompous, musical, and oratorical manner of composing; as in the following sentence of Sir William Temple: "If you look about you, and consider the lives of others as well as your own; if you think how few are born with honor, and how many die without name or children; how little beauty we see, and how few friends we hear of; how many diseases, and how much poverty there is in the world; you will fall down upon your knees, and, instead of repining at one affliction, will admire so many blessings which you have received from the hand of God." Cicero abounds with sentences constructed after this manner.

The *style coupé* is, where the sense is formed into short independent propositions, each complete within itself; as in the following of

Mr. Pope: "I confess it was want of consideration that made me an author. I wrote, because it amused me. I corrected, because it was as pleasant to me to correct as to write. I published, because, I was told, I might please such as it was a credit to please." This is very much the French method of writing, and always suits gay and easy subjects. The *style periodique* gives an air of gravity and dignity to composition. The *style coupé* is more lively and striking. According to the nature of the composition, therefore, and the general character it ought to bear, the one or the other may be predominant. But in almost every kind of composition the great rule is to intermix them, for the ear tires of either of them when too long continued; whereas, by a proper mixture of long and short periods, the ear is gratified, and a certain sprightliness is joined with majesty in our style.

This variety is of so great consequence that it must be studied, not only in the succession of long and short sentences, but in the structure of our sentences also. A train of sentences, constructed in the same manner, and with the same number of members, whether long or short, should never be allowed to succeed one another. However musical each of them may be, it has a better effect to introduce even a discord, than to cloy the ear with the repetition of similar sounds, for nothing

is so tiresome as perpetual uniformity. In this article of the construction and distribution of his sentences, Lord Shaftesbury has shown great art. In the last lecture I observed that he is often guilty of sacrificing precision of style to pomp of expression, and that there runs through his whole manner a stiffness and affectation which render him very unfit to be considered as a general model. But as his ear was fine, and as he was extremely attentive to everything that is elegant, he has studied the proper intermixture of long and short sentences, with variety and harmony in their structure, more than any other English author, and for this part of composition he deserves attention.

From these general observations, let us now descend to a more particular consideration of the qualities that are required to make a sentence perfect. So much depends upon the proper construction of sentences that, in every sort of composition, we can not be too strict in our attention to it. For, be the subject what it will, if the sentences be constructed in a clumsy, perplexed, or feeble manner, it is impossible that a work, composed of such sentences, can be read with pleasure, or even with profit. Whereas, by giving attention to the rules which relate to this part of style, we acquire the habit of expressing ourselves with perspicuity and elegance; and if a disorder chance to arise in some of our

sentences, we immediately see where it lies, and are able to rectify it.

The properties most essential to a perfect sentence seem to me to be the four following: 1. Clearness and precision. 2. Unity. 3. Strength. 4. Harmony. Each of these I shall illustrate separately, and at some length.

The first is clearness and precision. The least failure here, the least degree of ambiguity, which leaves the mind in any sort of suspense as to the meaning, ought to be avoided with the greatest care; nor is it so easy a matter to keep always clear of this, as one might at first imagine. Ambiguity arises from two causes: either from a wrong choice of words, or a wrong collocation of them. Of the choice of words, as far as regards perspicuity, I treated fully. Of the collocation of them I am now to treat. The first thing to be studied here is to observe exactly the rules of grammar, as far as these can guide us. But as the grammar of our language is not extensive, there may often be an ambiguous collocation of words, where there is no transgression of any grammatical rule. The relations which the words or members of a period bear to one another can not be pointed out in English, as in the Greek or the Latin, by means of termination. It is ascertained only by the position in which they stand. Hence, a capital rule in the arrangement of sentences is, that the words or mem-

bers most nearly related should be placed in the sentence as near to each other as possible, so as to make their mutual relation clearly appear. This is a rule not always observed, even by good writers, as strictly as it ought to be. It will be necessary to produce some instances which will both show the importance of this rule, and make the application of it understood.

First. In the position of adverbs, which are used to qualify the signification of something which either precedes or follows them, there is often a good deal of nicety. "By greatness," says Mr. Addison, in the *Spectator* (No. 412), "I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view." Here the place of the adverb "only" renders it a limitation of the following word, "mean." "I do not only mean." The question may then be put, What does he more than mean? Had he placed it after "bulk," still it would have been wrong. "I do not mean the *bulk only* of any single object." For we might then ask, What does he mean more than the bulk? Is it the color; or any other property? Its proper place, undoubtedly, is after the word "object." "By greatness, I do not mean the bulk of any single object only." Then, when we put the question, What more does he mean than the bulk of a single object, the answer comes out exactly as the author intends, and give it:

"The largeness of a whole view." "Theism," says Lord Shaftesbury, "can only be opposed to polytheism or atheism." Does he mean that theism is capable of nothing else except being opposed to polytheism or atheism? This is what his words literally import, through the wrong collocation of "only." He should have said, "Theism can be opposed only to polytheism or atheism." In like manner, Dean Swift (in "Project for the Advancement of Religion"), "The Romans understood liberty, at least, as well as we." These words are capable of two different senses, according as the emphasis, in reading them, is laid upon "liberty," or upon "at least." In the first case they will signify that whatever other things we may understand better than the Romans, *liberty,* at least, was one thing which they understood as well as we. In the second case, they will import that liberty was understood, *at least* as well by them as by us; meaning that by them it was better understood. If this last, as I make no doubt, was Dean Swift's own meaning, the ambiguity would have been avoided, and the sense rendered independent of the manner of pronouncing, by arranging the words thus: "The Romans understood liberty as well, at least, as we." The fact is, with respect to such adverbs as *only, wholly, at least,* and the rest of that tribe, that in common discourse the tone and emphasis we use in pronouncing

them generally serves to show their reference, and to make the meaning clear, and hence we acquire a habit of throwing them in loosely in the course of a period. But in writing, where a man speaks to the eye, and not to the ear, he ought to be more accurate, and so to connect those adverbs with the words which they qualify as to put his meaning out of doubt upon the first inspection.

Second. When a circumstance is interposed in the middle of a sentence, it sometimes requires attention how to place it so as to divest it of all ambiguity. For instance: "Are these designs" (says Lord Bolingbroke) — "are these designs which any man who is born a Briton, in any circumstances, in any situation, ought to be ashamed or afraid to avow?" Here we are left at a loss, whether these words "in any circumstances, in any situation," are connected with "a man born in Britain, in any circumstances, or situation," or with that man's "avowing his designs, in any circumstances, or situation, into which he may be brought?" If the latter, as seems most probable, was intended to be the meaning, the arrangement ought to have been conducted thus: "Are these designs, which any man who is born a Briton ought to be ashamed or afraid, in any circumstances, in any situation, to avow?"

Third. Still more attention is required to the proper disposition of the relative pro-

nouns *who, which, what, whose,* and of all those particles which express the connection of the parts of speech with one another. As all reasoning depends upon this connection, we can not be too accurate and precise here. A small error may overcloud the meaning of the whole sentence; and even where the meaning is intelligible, yet where these relative particles are out of their proper place, we always find something awkward and disjointed in the structure of the sentence. Thus, in the *Spectator* (No. 54), "This kind of wit," says Mr. Addison, "was very much in vogue among our countrymen about an age or two ago, who did not practise it for any oblique reason, but purely for the sake of being witty." We are at no loss about the meaning here, but the construction would evidently be mended by disposing of the circumstance, "about an age or two ago," in such a manner as not to separate the relative "who" from its antecedent, "our countrymen," in this way: "About an age or two ago, this kind of wit was very much in vogue among our countrymen, who did not practise it for any oblique reason, but purely for the sake of being witty." *Spectator* (No. 412): "We nowhere meet with a more glorious and pleasing show in nature than what appears in the heavens at the rising and setting of the sun, *which* is wholly made up of those different stains of light that show themselves in clouds

of a different situation." *Which* is here designed to connect with the word *show*, as its antecedent, but it stands so wide from it that without a careful attention to the sense we should be naturally led, by the rules of syntax, to refer it to the rising and setting of the sun, or to the sun itself; and, hence, an indistinctness is thrown over the whole sentence. The following passage in Bishop Sherlock's Sermons (Vol. II., Serm. 15) is still more censurable: "It is folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the accidents of life, by heaping up treasures, which nothing can protect us against, but the good providence of our Heavenly Father." *Which* always refers grammatically to the immediately preceding substantive, which here is "treasures," and this would make nonsense of the whole period. Every one feels this impropriety. The sentence ought to have stood thus: "It is folly to pretend, by heaping up treasures, to arm ourselves against the accidents of life, which nothing can protect us against but the good providence of our Heavenly Father."

Of the like nature is the following inaccuracy of Dean Swift's. He is recommending to young clergymen to write their sermons fully and distinctly. "Many," says he, "act so directly contrary to this method that, from a habit of saving time and paper, which they acquired at the university, they write in so diminutive a manner that they can hardly

read what they have written." He certainly does not mean that they had acquired time and paper at the university, but that they had acquired this habit there; and therefore his words ought to have run thus: "From a habit which they have acquired at the university of saving time and paper, they write in so diminutive a manner." In another passage, the same author has left his meaning altogether uncertain by misplacing a relative. It is in the conclusion of his letter to a member of Parliament, concerning the Sacramental Test: "Thus I have fairly given you, sir, my own opinion, as well as that of a great majority of both houses here, relating to this weighty affair, upon which, I am confident, you may securely reckon." Now I ask what it is he would have his correspondent to reckon upon securely? The natural construction leads to these words, "this weighty affair." But as it would be difficult to make any sense of this, it is more probable he meant that the majority of both houses might be securely reckoned upon; tho certainly this meaning, as the words are arranged, is obscurely exprest, the sentence would be amended by arranging thus: "Thus, sir, I have given you my own opinion relating to this weighty affair, as well as that of a great majority of both houses here, upon which I am confident you may securely reckon."

Several other instances might be given, but

I reckon those which I have produced sufficient to make the rule understood; that, in the construction of sentences, one of the first things to be attended to is the marshaling of the words in such order as shall most clearly mark the relation of the several parts of the sentence to one another; particularly, that adverbs shall always be made to adhere closely to the words which they are intended to qualify; that where a circumstance is thrown in, it shall never hang loose in the midst of a period, but be determined by its place to one or other member of it; and that every relative word which is used shall instantly present its antecedent to the mind of the reader, without the least obscurity. I have mentioned these three cases because I think they are the most frequent occasions of ambiguity creeping into sentences.

With regard to relatives, I must further observe that obscurity often arises from the too frequent repetitions of them, particularly of the pronouns *who,* and *they,* and *them,* and *theirs,* when we have occasion to refer to different persons, as in the following sentence of Archbishop Tillotson (Vol. I., Serm. 42): "Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others; and think that their reputation obscures them, and their commendable qualities stand in their light; and therefore they do what they can to cast a cloud over them, that the bright shining of their virtues

may not obscure them." This is altogether careless writing. It renders style often obscure, always embarrassed and inelegant. When we find these personal pronouns crowding too fast upon us, we have often no method left, but to throw the whole sentence into some other form, which may avoid those frequent references to persons who have before been mentioned.

I proceed now to the second quality of a well-arranged sentence, which I termed its "unity." This is a capital property. In every composition, of whatever kind, some degree of unity is required in order to render it beautiful. There must be always some connecting principle among the parts. Some one object must reign and be predominant. This holds in history, in epic and dramatic poetry, and in all orations. But most of all, in a single sentence, is required the strictest unity. For the very nature of a sentence implies one proposition to be exprest. It may consist of parts, indeed; but these parts must be so closely bound together as to make the impression upon the mind of one object, not of many. Now, in order to preserve this unity of a sentence, the following rules must be observed:

In the first place, during the course of the sentence, the scene should be changed as little as possible. We should not be hurried by sudden transitions from person to person, nor

from subject to subject. There is commonly, in every sentence, some person or thing which is the governing word. This should be continued so, if possible, from the beginning to the end of it. Should I express myself thus: "After we came to anchor, they put me on shore, where I was welcomed by all my friends, who received me with the greatest kindness." In this sentence, tho the objects contained in it have a sufficient connection with each other, yet, by this manner of representing them, by shifting so often both the place and the person, *we*, and *they*, and *I*, and *who*, they appear in such a disunited view that the sense of connection is almost lost. The sentence is restored to its proper unity by turning it after the following manner: "Having come to an anchor, I was put on shore, where I was welcomed by all my friends, and received with the greatest kindness." Writers who transgress this rule, for the most part transgress, at the same time,

A second rule: never to crowd into one sentence things which have so little connection that they could bear to be divided into two or three sentences. The violation of this rule never fails to hurt and displease a reader. Its effect, indeed, is so bad that, of the two, it is the safer extreme to err rather by too many short sentences than by one that is overloaded and embarrassed. Examples abound in authors. I shall produce some,

to justify what I now say. "Archbishop Tillotson," says an author of the History of England, "died in this year. He was exceedingly beloved both by King William and Queen Mary, who nominated Dr. Tennison, Bishop of Lincoln, to succeed him." Who would expect the latter part of this sentence to follow, in consequence of the former? "He was exceedingly beloved by both king and queen," is the proposition of the sentence. We look for some proof of this, or at least something related to it, to follow, when we are on a sudden carried off to a new proposition, "who nominated Dr. Tennison to succeed him." The following is from Middleton's Life of Cicero: "In this uneasy state, both of his public and private life, Cicero was opprest by a new and cruel affliction, the death of his beloved daughter Tullia, which happened soon after her divorce from Dolabella, whose manners and humors were entirely disagreeable to her." The principal object in this sentence is the death of Tullia, which was the cause of her father's affliction; the date of it, as happening soon after her divorce from Dolabella, may enter into the sentence with propriety, but the subjunction of Dolabella's character is foreign to the main object, and breaks the unity and compactness of the sentence totally, by setting a new picture before the reader. The following sentence, from a translation of Plutarch, is still worse:

"Their march," says the author, speaking of the Greeks under Alexander, "their march was through an uncultivated country, whose savage inhabitants fared hardly, having no other riches than a breed of lean sheep, whose flesh was rank and unsavory, by reason of their continual feeding upon sea-fish." Here the scene is changed upon us again and again. The march of the Greeks, the description of the inhabitants through whose country they traveled, the account of their sheep, and the cause of their sheep being ill-tasting food, form a jumble of objects, slightly related to each other, which the reader can not, without much difficulty, comprehend under one view.

These examples have been taken from sentences of no great length, yet overcrowded. Authors who deal in long sentences are very apt to be faulty in this article. One need only open Lord Clarendon's History to find examples everywhere. The long, involved, and intricate sentences of that author are the greatest blemish of his composition, tho in other respects, as a historian, he has considerable merit. In later, and more correct writers than Lord Clarendon, we find a period sometimes running out so far, and comprehending so many particulars, as to be more properly a discourse than a sentence. Take, for an instance, the following from Sir William Temple, in his Essay upon Poetry: "The usual acceptation takes profit and pleasure

for two different things, and not only calls the followers or votaries of them by the several names of Busy and Idle men, but distinguishes the faculties of the mind that are conversant about them, calling the operations of the first Wisdom, and of the other Wit, which is a Saxon word used to express what the Spaniards and Italians call *ingenio,* and the French *esprit,* both from the Latin, tho I think Wit more particularly signifies that of poetry, as may occur in Remarks on the Runic Language." When one arrives at the end of such a puzzled sentence, he is surprized to find himself got to so great a distance from the object with which he at first set out.

Lord Shaftesbury, often betrayed into faults by his love of magnificence, shall afford us the next example. It is in his Rhapsody, where he is describing the cold regions: "At length," says he, "the sun approaching, melts the snow, sets longing men at liberty, and affords them means and time to make provision against the next return of cold." This first sentence is correct enough, but he goes on: "It breaks the icy fetters of the main, where vast sea-monsters pierce through floating islands, with arms which can withstand the crystal rock; while others, who of themselves seem great as islands, are by their bulk alone armed against all but man, whose superiority over creatures of such stupendous

size and force should make him mindful of his privilege of reason, and force him humbly to adore the great Composer of these wondrous frames and the Author of his own superior wisdom." Nothing can be more unhappy or embarrassed than this sentence; the worse, too, as it is intended to be descriptive, where everything should be clear. It forms no distinct image whatever. The *it,* at the beginning, is ambiguous, whether it mean the sun or the cold. The object is changed three times in the sentence, beginning with the sun, which breaks the icy fetters of the main, then the sea-monsters become the principal personages, and lastly, by a very unexpected transition, man is brought into view, and receives a long and serious admonition before the sentence closes. I do not at present insist on the impropriety of such expressions as God's being the *composer of frames,* and the sea-monsters having *arms that withstand rocks.* Shaftesbury's strength lay in reasoning and sentiment, more than in description, however much his descriptions have been sometimes admired.

I shall give only one instance more on this head, from Dean Swift, in his Proposal, too, for correcting the English language, where in place of a sentence, he has given a loose dissertation upon several subjects. Speaking of the progress of our language after the time of Cromwell: "To this succeeded," says he,

"that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and, from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupt our language; which last was not like to be much improved by those who at that time made up the court of King Charles the Second; either such as had followed him in his banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of these fanatic times; or young men who had been educated in the same country: so that the Court, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued, the worst school in England for that accomplishment; and so will remain till better care be taken in the education of our nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundation of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness." How many different facts, reasonings, and observations are here presented to the mind at once, and yet so linked together by the author that they all make parts of a sentence, which admits of no greater division in pointing than a semicolon between any of its members! Having mentioned pointing, I shall here take notice that it is in vain to propose, by arbitrary punctuation, to amend the defects of a sentence, to correct its ambiguity, or to prevent its confusion. For commas, colons, and points do not make the proper divisions of thought, but only serve to mark those which arise

from the tenor of the author's expression; and, therefore, they are proper or not, just according as they correspond to the natural divisions of the sense. When they are inserted in wrong places, they deserve, and will meet with, no regard.

I proceed to a third rule for preserving the unity of sentences; which is, to keep clear of all parentheses in the middle of them. On some occasions these may have a spirited appearance, as prompted by a certain vivacity of thought which can glance happily aside, as it is going along. But, for the most part, their effect is extremely bad, being a sort of wheels within wheels, sentences in the midst of sentences, the perplexed method of disposing of some thought which a writer wants art to introduce in its proper place. It were needless to give many instances, as they occur so often among incorrect writers. I shall produce one from Lord Bolingbroke, the rapidity of whose genius and manner of writing betrays him frequently into inaccuracies of this sort. It is in the introduction to his Idea of a Patriot King, where he writes thus: "It seems to me that, in order to maintain the system of the world at a certain point, far below that of ideal perfection (for we are made capable of conceiving what we are incapable of attaining), but, however, sufficient, upon the whole, to constitute a state easy and happy, or at the worst, tolerable:

I say, it seems to me that the Author of nature has thought fit to mingle, from time to time, among the societies of men, a few, and but a few, of those on whom He is graciously pleased to bestow a larger portion of the Ethereal Spirit than is given, in the ordinary course of His government, to the sons of men." A very bad sentence this, into which, by the help of a parenthesis and other interjected circumstances, his Lordship had contrived to thrust so many things that he is forced to begin the construction again with the phrase, "I say," which, whenever it occurs, may be always assumed as a sure mark of a clumsy, ill-constructed sentence; excusable in speaking, where the greatest accuracy is not expected, but in polished writing, unpardonable.

I shall add only one rule more for the unity of a sentence, which is, to bring it always to a full and perfect close. Everything that is one should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. I need not take notice that an unfinished sentence is no sentence at all, according to any grammatical rule. But very often we meet with sentences that are, so to speak, more than finished. When we have arrived at what we expected was to be the conclusion, when we have come to the word on which the mind is naturally led by what went before, to rest; unexpectedly some circumstance pops out which ought to have been

omitted, or to have been disposed of elsewhere, but which is left lagging behind, like a tail adjected to the sentence, somewhat that, as Mr. Pope describes the Alexandrine line,

"Like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along."

All these adjections to the proper close, disfigure a sentence extremely. They give it a lame, ungraceful air, and, in particular, they break its unity. Dean Swift, for instance, in his Letter to a Young Clergyman, speaking of Cicero's writings, expresses himself thus: "With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who, by many degrees, excelled the other; at least, as an orator." Here the natural close of the sentence is at these words, "excelled the other." These words conclude the proposition; we look for no more; and the circumstance added, "at least, as an orator," comes in with a very halting pace. How much more compact would the sentence have been if turned thus: "With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who, by many degrees, as an orator at least, excelled the other." In the following sentence, from Sir William Temple, the adjection to the sentence is altogether foreign to it. Speaking of Burnet's Theory of the Earth, and Fontenelle's Plurality of Worlds, "The first," says he, "could

not end his learned treatise without a panegyric of modern learning, in comparison of the ancient; and the other falls so grossly into the censure of the old poetry, and preference of the new, that I could not read either of these strains without some indignation, which no quality among men is so apt to raise in me as self-sufficiency." The word "indignation" concluded the sentence; the last member, "which no quality among men is so apt to raise in me as self-sufficiency," is a proposition altogether new, added after the proper close.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES

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HAVING treated of perspicuity and unity, as necessary to be studied in the structure of sentences, I proceed to the third quality of a correct sentence, which I termed strength. By this I mean such a disposition of the several words and members as shall bring out the sense to the best advantage, as shall render the impression which the period is designed to make, most full and complete, and give every word and every member their due weight and force. The two former qualities of perspicuity and unity are, no doubt, absolutely necessary to the production of this effect, but more is still requisite. For a sentence may be clear enough, it may also be compact enough, in all its parts, or have the requisite unity; and yet, by some unfavorable circumstance in the structure, it may fail in that strength or liveliness of impression which a more happy arrangement would have produced.

The first rule which I shall give for promoting the strength of a sentence is, to divest it of all redundant words. These may sometimes be consistent with a considerable degree both of clearness and unity, but they

are always enfeebling. They make the sentence move along tardy and encumbered.

"Concise your diction, let your sense be clear,
Nor, with a weight of words, fatigue the ear."

It is a general maxim that any words which do not add some importance to the meaning of a sentence, always spoil it. They can not be superfluous without being hurtful. All that can be easily supplied in the mind, is better left out in the expression. Thus: "Content with deserving a triumph, he refused the honor of it," is better language than to say, "Being content with deserving a triumph, he refused the honor of it." I consider it, therefore, as one of the most useful exercises of correction, upon reviewing what we have written or composed, to contract that roundabout method of expression, and to lop off those useless excrescences which are commonly found in a first draft. Here a severe eye should be employed; and we shall always find our sentences acquire more vigor and energy when thus retrenched; provided always that we run not into the extreme of pruning so very close as to give a hardness and dryness to style. For here, as in all other things, there is a due medium. Some regard, tho not the principal, must be had to fulness and swelling of sound. Some leaves must be left to surround and shelter the fruit.

As sentences should be cleared of redund-

ant words, so also of redundant members. As every word ought to present a new idea, so every member ought to contain a new thought. Opposed to this stands the fault we sometimes meet with, of the last member of a period being no other than the echo of the former, or the repetition of it in somewhat a different form. For example, speaking of beauty, "The very first discovery of it," says Mr. Addison, "strikes the mind with inward joy, and spreads delight through all its faculties" (No. 412). And elsewhere, "It is impossible for us to behold the divine works with coldness or indifference, or to survey so many beauties without a secret satisfaction and complacency" (No. 413). In both these instances little or nothing is added by the second member of the sentence to what was already exprest in the first. Tho the free and flowing manner of such an author as Mr. Addison, and the graceful harmony of this period, may palliate such negligences, yet, in general, it holds that style, freed from this prolixity, appears both more strong and more beautiful. The attention becomes remiss, the mind falls into inaction, when words are multiplied without a corresponding multiplication of ideas.

After removing superfluities, the second direction I give for promoting the strength of a sentence is, to attend particularly to the use of copulatives, relatives, and all the par-

ticles employed for transition and connection. These little words, *but, and, which, whose, where,* etc., are frequently the most important words of any. They are the joints or hinges upon which all sentences turn, and, of course, much, both of their gracefulness and strength, must depend upon such particles. The varieties in using them are, indeed, so infinite that no particular system of rules respecting them can be given. Attention to the practise of the most accurate writers, joined with frequent trials of the different effects produced by a different usage of those particles, must here direct us. Some observations I shall mention, which have occurred to me as useful, without pretending to exhaust the subject.

What is called splitting of particles, or separating a preposition from the noun which it governs, is always to be avoided. As if I should say, "Tho virtue borrows no assistance from, yet it may often be accompanied by, the advantages of fortune." In such instances we feel a sort of pain from the revulsion, or violent separation of two things which, by their nature, should be closely united. We are put to a stand in thought, being obliged to rest for a little on the preposition by itself, which, at the same time, carries no significancy till it is joined to its proper substantive noun.

Some writers needlessly multiply demonstrative and relative particles by the frequent

use of such phraseology as this: "There is nothing which disgusts us sooner than the empty pomp of language." In introducing a subject, or laying down a proposition to which we demand particular attention, this sort of style is very proper; but in the ordinary current of discourse it is better to express ourselves more simply and shortly: "Nothing disgusts us sooner than the empty pomp of language."

Other writers make a practise of omitting the relative, in a phrase of a different kind from the former, where they think the meaning can be understood without it. As, "the man I love"; "the dominions we possest, and the conquests we made." But tho this elliptical style be intelligible, and is allowable in conversation and epistolary writing, yet in all writings of a serious or dignified kind it is ungraceful. There the relative should always be inserted in its proper place, and the construction filled up: "the man whom I love"; "the dominions which we possest, and the conquests which we made."

With regard to the copulative particle *and*, which occurs so frequently in all kinds of composition, several observations are to be made. First, it is evident that the unnecessary repetition of it enfeebles style. It has the same sort of effect as the frequent use of the vulgar phrase *and so*, when one is telling a story in common conversation. We

shall take a sentence from Sir William Temple for an instance. He is speaking of the refinement of the French language: "The academy set up by Cardinal Richelieu to amuse the wits of that age and country and divert them from raking into his politics and ministry, brought this into vogue; and the French wits have, for this last age, been wholly turned to the refinement of their style and language, and, indeed, with such success that it can hardly be equaled, and runs equally through their verse and their prose." Here are no fewer than eight *ands* in one sentence. This agreeable writer too often makes his sentences drag in this manner by a careless multiplication of copulatives. It is strange how a writer so accurate as Dean Swift should have stumbled on so improper an application of this particle as he has made in the following sentence from the Essay on the Fates of Clergymen: "There is no talent so useful toward rising in the world, or which puts men more out of the reach of fortune, than that quality generally possest by the dullest sort of people, and is, in common language, called 'discretion'; a species of lower prudence, by the assistance of which," etc. By the insertion of *and is* in place of *which is,* he has not only clogged the sentence, but even made it ungrammatical.

I proceed to a third rule for promoting the strength of a sentence, which is, to dispose of

the capital word, or words, in that place of the sentence where they will make the fullest impression. That such capital words there are in every sentence, on which the meaning principally rests, every one must see; and that these words should possess a conspicuous and distinguished place is equally plain. Indeed, that place of the sentence where they will make the best figure, whether the beginning or the end, or sometimes, even the middle, can not, as far as I know, be ascertained by any precise rule. This must vary with the nature of the sentence. Perspicuity must ever be studied in the first place; and the nature of our language allows no great liberty in the choice of collocation. For the most part, with us, the important words are placed in the beginning of the sentence. So Mr. Addison: "The pleasures of the imagination, taken in their full extent, are not so gross as those of sense, so refined as those of the understanding." And this, indeed, seems the most plain and natural order, to place that in the front which is the chief object of the proposition we are laying down. Sometimes, however, when we intend to give weight to a sentence, it is of advantage to suspend the meaning for a little, and then bring it out full at the close: "Thus," says Mr. Pope, "on whatever side we contemplate Homer, what principally strikes us is his wonderful invention." (Pref. to Homer.)

The Greek and Latin writers had a considerable advantage above us in this part of style. By the great liberty of inversion which their languages permitted, they could choose the most advantageous situation for every word, and had it thereby in their power to give their sentences more force. Milton, in his prose works, and some other of our old English writers, endeavored to imitate them in this. But the forced constructions which they employed, produced obscurity, and the genius of our language, as it is now written and spoken, will not admit such liberties. Mr. Gordon, who followed this inverted style in his Translation of Tacitus, has sometimes done such violence to the language as even to appear ridiculous, as in this expression: "Into this hole thrust themselves three Roman senators." He has translated so simple a phrase as, "Nullum ea tempestate bellum" by, "War at that time there was none." However, within certain bounds, and to a limited degree, our language does admit of inversions, and they are practised with success by the best writers. So Mr. Pope, speaking of Homer, "The praise of judgment Vergil has justly contested with him, but his invention remains yet unrivaled." It is evident that, in order to give the sentence its due force, by contrasting properly the two capital words "judgment and invention," this is a happier arrangement than if he had

followed the natural order, which was, "Vergil has justly contested with him the praise of judgment, but his invention remains yet unrivaled."

A fourth rule for constructing sentences with proper strength is, to make the members of them go on rising and growing in their importance above one another. This sort of arrangement is called a "climax," and is always considered as a beauty in composition. From what cause it pleases is abundantly evident. In all things we naturally love to ascend to what is more and more beautiful, rather than to follow the retrograde order. Having had once some considerable object set before us, it is with pain we are pulled back to attend to an inferior circumstance. Of this beauty, in the construction of sentences, the orations of Cicero furnish many examples. His pompous manner naturally led him to study it, and generally in order to render the climax perfect, he makes both the sense and the sound rise together, with a very magnificent swell. The following instance, from Lord Bolingbroke, is beautiful: "This decency, this grace, this propriety of manners to character, is so essential to princes in particular that whenever it is neglected, their virtues lose a great degree of luster, and their defects acquire much aggravation. Nay, more; by neglecting this decency and this grace, and for want of sufficient regard to

appearances, even their virtues may betray them into failings, their failings into vices, and their vices into habits unworthy of princes, and unworthy of men."

A fifth rule for the strength of sentences is, to avoid concluding them with an adverb, a preposition, or any inconsiderable word. Such conclusions are always enfeebling and degrading. There are sentences, indeed, where the stress and significancy rest chiefly upon some words of this kind. In this case they are not to be considered as circumstances, but as the capital figures; and ought, in propriety, to have the principal place allotted them. No fault, for instance, can be found with this sentence of Bolingbroke's: "In their prosperity my friends shall never hear of me; in their adversity, always," where *never* and *always,* being emphatic words, were to be so placed as to make a strong impression. But I speak now of those inferior parts of speech when introduced as circumstances or as qualifications of more important words. In such case they should always be disposed of in the least conspicuous parts of the period, and so classed with other words of greater dignity as to be kept in their proper secondary station.

Agreeably to this rule, we should always avoid concluding with any of those particles which mark the cases of nouns, *of, to, from, with, by.* For instance, it is a great deal

better to say, "Avarice is a crime of which wise men are often guilty," than to say, "Avarice is a crime which wise men are often guilty of." This is a phraseology which all correct writers shun, and with reason. For, beside the want of dignity which arises from those monosyllables at the end, the imagination can not avoid resting, for a little, on the import of the word which closes the sentence; and, as those prepositions have no import of their own, but only serve to point out the relations of other words, it is disagreeable for the mind to be left pausing on a word which does not, by itself, produce any idea nor form any picture in the fancy.

For the same reason, verbs which are used in a compound sense with some of these prepositions are, tho not so bad, yet still not so beautiful conclusions of a period; such as, *bring about, lay hold of, come over to, clear up,* and many other of this kind; instead of which, if we can employ a simple verb, it always terminates the sentence with more strength. Even the pronoun *it,* tho it has the import of a substantive noun, and indeed often forces itself upon us unavoidably, yet, when we want to give dignity to a sentence, should, if possible, be avoided in the conclusion, more especially when it is joined with some of the prepositions, as *with it, in it, to it.* In the following sentence of the *Spectator,* which otherwise is abundantly noble, the bad

effect of this close is sensible: "There is not, in my opinion, a more pleasing and triumphant consideration in religion than this, of the perpetual progress which the soul makes toward the perfection of its nature, without ever arriving at a period in it." How much more graceful the sentence if it had been so constructed as to close with the word *period!*

The fundamental rule of the construction of sentences, and into which all others might be resolved, undoubtedly is, to communicate in the clearest and most natural order the ideas which we mean to transfuse into the minds of others. Every arrangement that does most justice to the sense, and expresses it to most advantage, strikes us as beautiful. To this point have tended all the rules I have given. And, indeed, did men always think clearly, and were they, at the same time, fully masters of the language in which they write, there would be occasion for few rules. Their sentences would then, of course, acquire all those properties of precision, unity, and strength, which I have recommended. For we may rest assured that whenever we express ourselves ill, there is, beside the mismanagement of language, for the most part, some mistake in our manner of conceiving the subject. Embarrassed, obscure, and feeble sentences are generally, if not always, the result of embarrassed, obscure, and feeble thought.

Thought and language act and react upon each other mutually. Logic and rhetoric have here, as in many other cases, a strict connection; and he that is learning to arrange his sentences with accuracy and order, is learning, at the same time, to think with accuracy and order; an observation which alone will justify all the care and attention we have bestowed on this subject.

CHAPTER V

STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES—HARMONY

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HITHERTO we have considered sentences, with respect to their meaning, under the heads of perspicuity, unity, and strength. We are now to consider them with respect to their sound, their harmony, or agreeableness to the ear, which was the last quality belonging to them that I proposed to treat of.

Sound is a quality much inferior to sense, yet such as must not be disregarded. For as long as sounds are the vehicle of conveyance for our ideas, there will be always a very considerable connection between the idea which is conveyed and the nature of the sound which conveys it. Pleasing ideas can hardly be transmitted to the mind by means of harsh and disagreeable sounds. The imagination revolts as soon as it hears them uttered. Quintilian says, "Nothing can enter into the affections which stumbles at the threshold, by offending the ear." Music has naturally a great power over all men to prompt and facilitate certain emotions; insomuch that there are hardly any dispositions which we wish to raise in others, but certain sounds

may be found concordant to those dispositions and tending to promote them. Now language may, in some degree, be rendered capable of this power of music, a circumstance which must needs heighten our idea of language as a wonderful invention. Not content with simply interpreting our ideas to others, it can give them those ideas enforced by corresponding sounds, and to the pleasure of communicated thought can add the new and separate pleasure of melody.

In the harmony of periods, two things may be considered. First, agreeable sound, or modulation in general, without any particular expression. Next, the sound so ordered as to become expressive of the sense. The first is the more common; the second, the higher beauty.

First, let us consider agreeable sound, in general, as the property of a well-constructed sentence; and, as it was of prose sentences we have hitherto treated, we shall confine ourselves to them under this head. This beauty of musical construction in prose, it is plain, will depend upon two things: the choice of words, and the arrangement of them.

I begin with the choice of words, on which head there is not much to be said, unless I were to descend into a tedious and frivolous detail concerning the powers of the several letters, or simple sounds, of which speech is composed. It is evident that words are most

agreeable to the ear which are composed of smooth and liquid sounds, where there is a proper intermixture of vowels and consonants; without too many harsh consonants rubbing against each other, or too many vowels in succession, to cause a hiatus or disagreeable aperture of the mouth. It may always be assumed as a principle that, whatever sounds are difficult in pronunciation are, in the same proportion, harsh and painful to the ear. Vowels give softness; consonants, strength, to the sound of words. The music of language requires a just proportion of both, and will be hurt, will be rendered either grating or effeminate, by an excess of either. Long words are commonly more agreeable to the ear than monosyllables. They please it by the composition, or succession of sounds which they present to it; and, accordingly, the most musical languages abound most in them. Among words of any length those are the most musical which do not run wholly either upon long or short syllables, but are composed of an intermixture of them; such as, *repent, produce, velocity, celerity, independent, impetuosity.*

The next head, respecting the harmony which results from a proper arrangement of the words and members of a period, is more complex and of greater nicety. For let the words themselves be ever so well chosen and well founded, yet, if they be ill disposed, the

music of the sentence is utterly lost. In the harmonious structure and disposition of periods no writer whatever, ancient or modern, equals Cicero. He had studied this with care, and was fond, perhaps to excess, of what he calls the "plena ac numerosa oratio." We need only open his writings to find instances that will render the effect of musical language sensible to every ear. In English, we may take, for an instance of a musical sentence, the following from Milton, in his Treatise on Education: "We shall conduct you to a hillside, laborious, indeed, at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospects and melodious sounds on every side that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming." Everything in this sentence conspires to promote the harmony. The words are happily chosen, full of liquids and soft sounds, *laborious, smooth, green, goodly, melodious, charming;* and these words so artfully arranged that, were we to alter the collocation of any one of them, we should presently be sensible of the melody suffering. For, let us observe, how finely the members of the period swell one above another. "So smooth, so green," "so full of goodly prospects, and melodious sounds on every side"; till the ear, prepared by this gradual rise, is conducted to that full close on which it rests with pleasure, "that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming."

The structure of periods, then, being susceptible of a very sensible melody, our next inquiry should be, How this melodious structure is formed, what are the principles of it, and by what laws is it regulated? And upon this subject, were I to follow the ancient rhetoricians, it would be easy to give a great variety of rules. For here they have entered into a very minute and particular detail, more particular, indeed, than on any other head that regards language. They hold that to prose, as well as to verse, there belong certain numbers, less strict indeed, yet such as can be ascertained by rule. They go so far as to specify the feet, as they are called, that is, the succession of long and short syllables, which should enter into the different members of a sentence, and to show what the effect of each of these will be. Wherever they treat of the structure of sentences, it is always the music of them that makes the principal object. Cicero and Quintilian are full of this. The other qualities of precision, unity, and strength, which we consider as of chief importance, they handle slightly; but when they come to the "*juncture et numerus,*" the modulation and harmony, there they are copius. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, one of the most judicious critics of antiquity, has written a treatise on the Composition of Words in a Sentence, which is altogether confined to their musical effect. He makes the

excellency of a sentence to consist in four things: first, in the sweetness of single sounds; secondly, in the composition of sounds, that is, the numbers or feet; thirdly, in change of variety of sound; and, fourthly, in sound suited to the sense. On all these points he writes with great accuracy and refinement, and is very worthy of being consulted, tho, were one now to write a book on the structure of sentences, we should expect to find the subject treated of in a more extensive manner.

In modern times this whole subject of the musical structure of discourse, it is plain, has been much less studied; and, indeed, for several reasons, can be much less subjected to rule. The reasons it will be necessary to give, both to justify my not following the track of the ancient rhetoricians on this subject, and to show how it has come to pass that a part of composition which once made so conspicuous a figure, now draws much less attention.

In the first place, the ancient languages, I mean the Greek and the Roman, were much more susceptible than ours of the graces and the powers of melody. The quantities of their syllables were more fixt and determined; their words were longer and more sonorous; their method of varying the terminations of nouns and verbs, both introduced a greater variety of liquid sounds, and freed them from

that multiplicity of little auxiliary words which we are obliged to employ; and, what is of the greatest consequence, the inversions which their languages allowed gave them the power of placing their words in whatever order was most suited to a musical arrangement. All these were great advantages which they enjoyed above us, for harmony of period.

In the next place, the Greeks and Romans, the former especially, were, in truth, much more musical nations than we; their genius was more turned to delight in the melody of speech. Music is known to have been a more extensive art among them than it is with us; more generally studied, and applied to a greater variety of objects. Several learned men, particularly the Abbé du Bos, in his Reflections on Poetry and Painting, have clearly proved that the theatrical compositions of the ancients, both their tragedies and comedies, were set to a kind of music. Whence, the *Modos fecit,* and the *Tibiis dextris et finistris,* prefixt to the editions of Terence's Plays. All sort of declamation and public speaking was carried on by them in a much more musical tone than it is among us. It approached to a kind of chanting or recitative. Among the Athenians there was what was called the Nomic Melody; or a particular measure prescribed to the public officers, in which they were to promulgate the laws to the people; left, by reading them with im-

proper tones, the laws might be exposed to contempt. Among the Romans there is a noted story of C. Gracchus, when he was declaiming in public, having a musician standing at his back in order to give him the proper tones, with a pipe or flute. Even when pronouncing those terrible tribunitial harangues, by which he inflamed the one-half of the citizens of Rome against the other, this attention to the music of speech was in those times, it seems, thought necessary to success. Quintilian, tho he condemns the excess of this sort of pronunciation, yet allows a "cantus obscurior" to be a beauty in a public speaker. Hence that variety of accents, acute, grave, and circumflex, which we find marked upon the Greek syllables, to express, not the quantity of them, but the tone in which they were to be spoken; the application of which is now wholly unknown to us. And tho the Romans did not mark those accents in their writing, yet it appears, from Quintilian, that they used them in pronunciation. As music then was an object much more attended to in speech among the Greeks and Romans than it is with us; as, in all kinds of public speaking, they employed a much greater variety of notes, of tones, or inflexions of voice than we use; this is one clear reason of their paying a greater attention to that construction of sentences which might best suit this musical pronunciation.

It is further known that, in consequence of the genius of their languages, and of their manner of pronouncing them, the musical arrangement of sentences did, in fact, produce a greater effect in public speaking among them than it could possibly do in any modern oration, another reason why it deserved to be more studied. Cicero, in his treatise entitled Orator, tells us, "I have often been witness to bursts of exclamation in the public assemblies, when sentences closed musically; for that is a pleasure which the ear expects." And he gives a remarkable instance of the effect of a harmonious period upon a whole assembly, from a sentence of one of Carbo's Orations, spoken in his hearing. The sentence was: "Patris dictum sapiens temeritas filii comprobravit." He makes us remark the feet of which these words consist, to which he ascribes the power of the melody, and shows how, by altering the collocation the whole effect would be lost. Now, tho it be true that Carbo's sentence is extremely musical, and would be agreeable at this day to any audience, yet I can not believe that an English sentence equally harmonious would, by its harmony alone, produce any such effect on a British audience, or excite any such wonderful applause and admiration as Cicero informs us this of Carbo produced. Our northern ears are too coarse and obtuse. The melody of speech has less power over us, and

by our simpler and plainer method of uttering words, speech is, in truth, accompanied with less melody than it was among the Greeks and Romans.

For these reasons I am of opinion that it is in vain to think of bestowing the same attention upon the harmonious structure of our sentences that was bestowed by these ancient nations. The doctrine of the Greek and Roman critics, on this head, had misled some to imagine that it might be equally applied to our tongue, and that our prose writing might be regulated by spondees and trochees, and iambuses and pæans, and other metrical feet. But, first, our words can not be measured, or, at least, can be measured very imperfectly by any feet of this kind. For the quantity, the length and shortness of our syllables is far from being so fixt and subjected to rule, as in the Greek and Roman tongues; but very often left arbitrary, and determined by the emphasis and the sense. Next, tho our prose could admit of such metrical regulation, yet, from our plainer method of pronouncing all sort of discourse, the effect would not be at all so sensible to the ear, nor be relished with so much pleasure as among the Greeks and Romans. And, lastly, this whole doctrine about the measures and numbers of prose, even as it is delivered by the ancient rhetoricians themselves, is, in truth, in a great measure loose and uncer-

tain. It appears, indeed, that the melody of discourse was a matter of infinitely more attention to them than ever it has been to the moderns. But, tho they write a great deal about it, they have never been able to reduce it to any rules which could be of real use in practise. If we consult Cicero's Orator, where this point is discust with the most minuteness, we shall see how much these ancient critics differed from one another about the feet proper for the conclusion and other parts of a sentence, and how much, after all, was left to the judgment of the ear. Nor, indeed, is it possible to give precise rules concerning this matter, in any language; as all prose composition must be allowed to run loose in its numbers, and according as the tenor of a discourse varies, the modulation of sentences must vary infinitely.

But altho I apprehend that this musical arrangement can not be reduced into a system, I am far from thinking that it is a quality to be neglected in composition. On the contrary, I hold its effect to be very considerable, and that every one who studies to write with grace, much more who seeks to pronounce in public with success, will be obliged to attend to it not a little. But it is his ear, cultivated by attention and practise, that must chiefly direct him. For any rules that can be given on this subject are very general. Some rules, however, there are

which may be of use to form the ear to the proper harmony of discourse. I proceed to mention such as appear to me most material.

There are two things on which the music of a sentence chiefly depends. These are, the proper distribution of the several members of it, and the close or cadence of the whole.

First, I say, the distribution of the several members is to be carefully attended to. It is of importance to observe that whatever is easy and agreeable to the organs of speech, always sounds grateful to the ear. While a period is going on, the termination of each of its members forms a pause, or rest, in pronouncing, and these rests should be so distributed as to make the course of the breathing easy, and, at the same time, should fall at such distances as to bear a certain musical proportion to each other. This will be best illustrated by examples. The following sentence is from Archbishop Tillotson: "This discourse concerning the easiness of God's commands does, all along, suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious course, except only in those persons who have had the happiness to be trained up to religion by the easy and insensible degrees of a pious and virtuous education." Here there is no harmony; nay, there is some degree of harshness and unpleasantness, owing principally to this, that there is, properly, no more than one pause or rest in the

sentence falling between the two members into which it is divided, each of which is so long as to occasion a considerable stretch of the breath in pronouncing it.

Observe, now, on the other hand, the ease with which the following sentence, from Sir William Temple, glides along, and the graceful intervals at which the pauses are placed. He is speaking sarcastically of man: "But God be thanked, his pride is greater than his ignorance, and what he wants in knowledge he supplies by sufficiency. When he has looked about him, as far as he can, he concludes there is no more to be seen; when he is at the end of his line he is at the bottom of the ocean; when he has shot his best, he is sure none ever did, nor ever can, shoot better, or beyond it. His own reason he holds to be the certain measure of truth; and his own knowledge, of what is possible in nature." Here everything is, at once, easy to the breath and graceful to the ear; and it is this sort of flowing measure, this regular and proportional division of the members of his sentences, which renders Sir William Temple's style always agreeable. I must observe, at the same time, that a sentence with too many rests, and these placed at intervals too apparently measured and regular, is apt to savor of affectation.

The next thing to be attended to is, the close or cadence of the whole sentence, which, as it is always the part most sensible to the

ear, demands the greatest care. So Quintilian: "Let there be nothing harsh or abrupt in the conclusion of the sentence, on which the mind pauses and rests. This is the most material part in the structure of discourse. Here every hearer expects to be gratified; here his applause breaks forth." The only important rule that can be given here is, that when we aim at dignity or elevation, the sound should be made to grow to the last; the longest members of the period, and the fullest and most sonorous words should be reserved to the conclusion. As an example of this, the following sentence of Mr. Addison's may be given: "It fills the mind (speaking of sight) with the largest variety of ideas; converses with its objects at the greatest distance; and continues the longest in action, without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments." Every reader must be sensible of a beauty here, both in the proper division of the members and pauses, and the manner in which the sentence is rounded and conducted to a full and harmonious close.

The same holds in melody that I observed to take place with respect to significancy; that a falling off at the end always hurts greatly. For this reason, particles, pronouns, and little words are as ungracious to the ear at the conclusion as I formerly showed they were inconsistent with strength of expression. It is more than probable that the sense and the

sound have here a mutual influence on each other. That which hurts the ear seems to mar the strength of the meaning, and that which really degrades the sense, in consequence of this primary effect, appears also to have a bad sound. How disagreeable is the following sentence of an author, speaking of the Trinity: "It is a mystery which we firmly believe the truth of, and humbly adore the depth of." And how easily might it have been mended by this transposition: "It is a mystery, the truth of which we firmly believe, and the depth of which we humbly adore." In general, it seems to hold that a musical close, in our language requires either the last syllable, or the last but one, to be a long syllable. Words which consist mostly of short syllables, as, *contrary, particular, retrospect,* seldom conclude a sentence harmoniously unless a run of long syllables, before, has rendered them agreeable to the ear.

It is necessary, however, to observe that sentences so constructed as to make the sound always swell and grow toward the end, and to rest either on a long or a penult long syllable, give a discourse the tone of declamation. The ear soon becomes acquainted with the melody, and is apt to be cloyed with it. If we would keep up the attention of the reader or hearer, if we would preserve vivacity and strength in our composition, we must be very attentive to vary our measures. This

regards the distribution of the members, as well as the cadence of the period. Sentences constructed in a similar manner, with the pauses falling at equal intervals, should never follow one another. Short sentences should be intermixed with long and swelling ones, to render discourse sprightly as well as magnificent. Even discords, properly introduced, abrupt sounds, departures from regular cadence, have sometimes a good effect. Monotony is the great fault into which writers are apt to fall, who are fond of harmonious arrangement; and to have only one tune, or measure, is not much better than having none at all. A very vulgar ear will enable a writer to catch some one melody and to form the run of his sentences according to it, which soon proves disgusting. But a just and correct ear is requisite for varying and diversifying the melody; and hence we so seldom meet with authors who are remarkably happy in this respect, however pleasing their writings may be otherwise.

Tho attention to the music of sentences must not be neglected, yet it must also be kept within proper bounds; for all appearances of an author's affecting harmony are disagreeable, especially when the love of it betrays him so far as to sacrifice, in any instance, perspicuity, precision, or strength of sentiment, to sound. All unmeaning words, introduced merely to round the period, or

fill up the melody, are great blemishes in writing, and they should be most carefully avoided. They are childish and puerile ornaments, by which a sentence always loses more in point of weight than it can gain by such additions to the beauty of its sound. Sense has its own harmony, as well as sound; and, where the sense of a period is exprest with clearness, force, and dignity, it will seldom happen but the words will strike the ear agreeably; at least, a very moderate attention is all that is requisite for making the cadence of such a period pleasing: and the effect of greater attention is often no other than to render composition languid and enervated. After all the labor which Quintilian bestows on regulating the measures of prose, he comes at last, with his usual good sense, to this conclusion: "Upon the whole, I would rather choose that composition should appear rough and harsh, if that be necessary, than that it should be enervated and effeminate, such as we find the style of too many. Some sentences, therefore, which we have studiously formed into melody, should be thrown loose, that they may not seem too much labored; nor ought we ever to omit any proper or expressive word, for the sake of smoothing a period."

Cicero, as I before observed, is one of the most remarkable patterns of a harmonious style. His love of it, however, is too visible,

and the pomp of his numbers sometimes detracts from his strength. That noted close of his, *effe videatur*, which, in the Oration Pro Lege Manilia, occurs eleven times, exposed him to censure among his contemporaries. We must observe, however, in defense of this great orator, that there is a remarkable union in his style of harmony with ease, which is always a great beauty, and if his harmony be studied, that study appears to have cost him little trouble.

Among our English classics, not many are distinguished for musical arrangement. Milton, in some of his prose works, has very finely turned periods; but the writers of his age indulged a liberty of inversion which now would be reckoned contrary to purity of style; and tho this allowed their sentences to be more stately and sonorous, yet it gave them too much of a Latinized construction and order. Of later writers, Shaftesbury is, upon the whole, the most correct in his numbers. As his ear was delicate, he has attended to music in all his sentences; and he is peculiarly happy in this respect, that he has avoided the monotony into which writers who study the grace of sound are very apt to fall: having diversified his periods with great variety. Mr. Addison has also much harmony in his style; more easy and smooth, but less varied, than Lord Shaftesbury. Sir William Temple is, in general, very flowing and agree-

able. Archbishop Tillotson is too often careless and languid, and is much outdone by Bishop Atterbury in the music of his periods. Dean Swift despised musical arrangement altogether.

CHAPTER VI

GENERAL CHARACTERS OF STYLE —DIFFUSE, CONCISE—FEEBLE, NERVOUS—DRY, PLAIN, NEAT, ELEGANT, FLOWERY

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GENERAL CHARACTERS OF STYLE —DIFFUSE, CONCISE—FEEBLE, NERVOUS—DRY, PLAIN, NEAT, ELEGANT, FLOWERY

WHEN I entered on the consideration of style, I observed that words being the copies of our ideas, there must always be a very intimate connection between the manner in which every writer employs words, and his manner of thinking; and that, from the peculiarity of thought and expression which belongs to him, there is a certain character imprinted on his style, which may be denominated his manner, commonly exprest by such general terms as strong, weak, dry, simple, affected, or the like. These distinctions carry, in general, some reference to an author's manner of thinking, but refer chiefly to his mode of expression. They arise from the whole tenor of his language, and comprehend the effect produced by all those parts of style which we have already considered; the choice which he makes of single words; his arrangement of these in sentences; the degree of his precision; and his embellishment, by means of musical cadence, figures, or other arts of speech. Of such general

characters of style, therefore, it remains now to speak, as the result of those underparts of which I have hitherto treated.

That different subjects require to be treated of in different sorts of style is a position so obvious that I shall not stay to illustrate it. Every one sees that treatises of philosophy, for instance, ought not to be composed in the same style with orations. Every one sees also that different parts of the same composition require a variation in the style and manner. In a sermon, for instance, or any harangue, the application or peroration admits more ornament, and requires more warmth, than the didactic part. But what I mean at present to remark is, that amidst this variety we still expect to find, in the composition of any one man, some degree of uniformity or consistency with himself in manner; we expect to find some predominant character of style imprest on all his writings, which shall be suited to, and shall mark, his particular genius and turn of mind. The orations in Livy differ much in style, as they ought to do, from the rest of his history. The same is the case with those in Tacitus. Yet both in Livy's orations and in those of Tacitus, we are able clearly to trace the distinguishing manner of each historian; the magnificent fulness of the one, and the sententious conciseness of the other. The "Lettres Perfanes," and "L'Esprit de Loix," are the works of the

same author. They required very different composition surely, and accordingly they differ widely; yet still we see the same hand. Wherever there is real and native genius, it gives a determination to one kind of style rather than another. Where nothing of this appears, where there is no marked nor peculiar character in the compositions of any author, we are apt to infer, not without reason, that he is a vulgar and trivial author who writes from imitation, and not from the impulse of original genius. As the most celebrated painters are known by their hand, so the best and most original writers are known and distinguished, throughout all their works, by their style and peculiar manner. This will be found to hold almost without exception.

The ancient critics attended to these general characters of style which we are now to consider. Dionysius of Halicarnassus divides them into three kinds, and calls them the "austere," the "florid," and the "middle." By the "austere" he means a style distinguished for strength and firmness, with a neglect of smoothness and ornament, for examples of which he gives Pindar and Æschylus among the poets, and Thucydides among the prose writers. By the "florid" he means, as the name indicates, a style ornamented, flowing, and sweet, resting more upon numbers and grace than strength; he instances

Hesiod, Sappho, Anacreon, Euripides, and principally Isocrates. The "middle" kind is the just mean between these, and comprehends the beauties of both. In this class he places Homer and Sophocles among the poets; in prose, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Plato, and (what seems strange), Aristotle. This must be a very wide class, indeed, which comprehends Plato and Aristotle under one article as to style.

One of the first and most obvious distinctions of the different kinds of style is what arises from an author's spreading out his thoughts more or less. This distinction forms what are called the "diffuse" and the "concise" styles. A concise writer compresses his thought into the fewest possible words; he seeks to employ none but such as are most expressive; he lops off, as redundant, every expression which does not add something material to the sense. Ornament he does not reject; he may be lively and figured; but his ornament is intended for the sake of force, rather than grace. He never gives you the same thought twice. He places it in the light which appears to him the most striking; but if you do not apprehend it well in that light, you need not expect to find it in any other. His sentences are arranged with compactness and strength, rather than with cadence and harmony. The utmost precision is studied in them, and they are commonly designed to

suggest more to the reader's imagination than they directly express.

A diffuse writer unfolds his thought fully. He places it in a variety of lights, and gives the reader every possible assistance for understanding it completely. He is not very careful to express it at first in its full strength, he proposes to supply by copiousness. Writers of this character generally love magnificence and amplification. Their periods naturally run out into some length, and having room for ornament of every kind, they admit it freely.

Each of these manners has its peculiar advantages, and each becomes faulty when carried to the extreme. The extreme of conciseness becomes abrupt and obscure; it is apt also to lead into a style too pointed, and bordering on the epigrammatic. The extreme of diffuseness becomes weak and languid, and tires the reader. However, to one or other of these two manners a writer may lean, according as his genius prompts him; and under the general character of a concise, or of a more open and diffuse style, may possess much beauty in his composition.

For illustrations of these general characters, I can only refer to the writers who are examples of them. It is not so much from detached passages, such as I was wont formerly to quote for instances, as from the current of an author's style, that we are to col-

lect the idea of a formed manner of writing. The two most remarkable examples that I know, of conciseness carried as far as propriety will allow, perhaps in some cases farther, are Tacitus, the historian, and the President Montesquieu in "L'Esprit de Loix." Aristotle, too, holds an eminent rank among didactic writers for his brevity. Perhaps no writer in the world was ever so frugal of his words as Aristotle; but this frugality of expression frequently darkens his meaning. Of a beautiful and magnificent diffuseness, Cicero is, beyond doubt, the most illustrious instance that can be given. Addison, also, and Sir William Temple, come in some degree under this class.

In judging when it is proper to lean to the concise, and when to the diffuse manner, we must be directed by the nature of the composition. Discourses that are to be spoken require a more copious style than books that are to be read. When the whole meaning must be caught from the mouth of the speaker, without the advantage which books afford of pausing at pleasure and reviewing what appears obscure, great conciseness is always to be avoided. We should never presume too much on the quickness of our hearer's understanding, but our style ought to be such that the bulk of men can go along with us easily and without effort. A flowing, copious style, therefore, is required in all public speakers; guard-

ing, at the same time, against such a degree of diffusion as renders them languid and tiresome, which will always prove the case when they inculcate too much and present the same thought under too many different views.

In written compositions a certain degree of conciseness possesses great advantages. It is more lively, keeps up attention, makes a brisker and stronger impression, and gratifies the mind by supplying more exercise to a reader's own thought. A sentiment which, exprest diffusely, will barely be admitted to be just, exprest concisely, will be admired as spirited. Description, when we want to have it vivid and animated, should be in a concise strain. This is different from the common opinion, most persons being ready to suppose that upon description a writer may dwell more safely than upon other things, and that by a full and extended style it is rendered more rich and expressive. I apprehend, on the contrary, that a diffuse manner generally weakens it. Any redundant words or circumstances encumber the fancy, and make the object we present to it appear confused and indistinct. Accordingly, the most masterly describers, Homer, Tacitus, Milton, are almost always concise in their descriptions. They show us more of an object at one glance than a feeble, diffuse writer can show by turning it round and round in a variety of lights. The strength and vivacity of description,

whether in prose or poetry, depend much more upon the happy choice of one or two striking circumstances than upon the multiplication of them.

Addresses to the passions, likewise, ought to be in the concise, rather than the diffuse manner. In these, it is dangerous to be diffuse, because it is very difficult to support proper warmth for any length of time. When we become prolix, we are always in hazard of cooling the reader. The heart, too, and the fancy run fast; and if once we can put them in motion, they supply many particulars to greater advantage than an author can display them. The case is different when we address ourselves to the understanding, as in all matters of reasoning, explication, and instruction. There I would prefer a more free and diffuse manner. When you are to strike the fancy, or to move the heart, be concise; when you are to inform the understanding, which moves more slowly, and requires the assistance of a guide, it is better to be full. Historical narration may be beautiful, either in a concise or a diffuse manner, according to the writer's genius. Livy and Herodotus are diffuse; Thucydides and Sallust are succinct; yet all of them are agreeable.

I observed that a diffuse style generally abounds in long periods; and a concise writer, it is certain, will often employ short sentences. It is not, however, to be inferred from this

that long or short sentences are fully characteristic of the one or the other manner. It is very possible for one to compose always in short sentences, and to be withal extremely diffuse, if a small measure of sentiment be spread through many of these sentences. Seneca is a remarkable example. By the shortness and quaintness of his sentences he may appear at first view very concise; yet he is far from being so. He transfigures the same thought into many different forms. He makes it pass for a new one, only by giving it a new turn. So, also, most of the French writers compose in short sentences, tho their style, in general, is not concise, commonly less so than the bulk of English writers, whose sentences are much longer. A French author breaks down into two or three sentences that portion of thought which an English author crowds into one. The direct effect of short sentences is to render the style brisk and lively, but not always concise. By the quick successive impulses which they make on the mind, they keep it awake, and give to composition more of a spirited character. Long periods, like Lord Clarendon's are grave and stately; but, like all grave things, they are in hazard of becoming dull. An intermixture of both long and short ones is requisite, when we would support solemnity together with vivacity, leaning more to the one or the other, according as propriety requires that the solemn or the spright-

ly should be predominant in our composition. The nervous and the feeble are generally held to be characters of style of the same import with the concise and the diffuse. They do indeed very often coincide. Diffuse writers have, for the most part, some degree of feebleness, and nervous writers will generally be inclined to a concise expression. This, however, does not always hold, and there are instances of writers who, in the midst of a full and ample style, have maintained a great degree of strength. Livy is an example, and, in the English language, Dr. Barrow. Barrow's style has many faults. It is unequal, incorrect, and redundant, but withal, for force and expressiveness, uncommonly distinguished. On every subject he multiplies words with an overflowing copiousness, but it is always a torrent of strong ideas and significant expressions which he pours forth. Indeed, the foundations of a nervous or a weak style are laid in an author's manner of thinking. If he conceives an object strongly, he will express it with energy, but, if he has only an indistinct view of his subject, if his ideas be loose and wavering, if his genius be such, or, at the time of his writing, so carelessly exerted that he has no firm hold of the conception which he would communicate to us: the marks of all this will clearly appear in his style. Several unmeaning words and loose epithets will be found, his expressions will be

vague and general, his arrangement indistinct and feeble, we shall conceive somewhat of his meaning, but our conception will be faint. Whereas a nervous writer, whether he employs an extended or a concise style, gives us always a strong impression of his meaning; his mind is full of his subject, and his words are all expressive; every phrase and every figure which he uses tends to render the picture which he would set before us more lively and complete.

I observed, under the head of Diffuse and Concise Style, that an author might lean either to the one or to the other, and yet be beautiful. This is not the case with respect to the nervous and the feeble. Every author, in every composition, ought to study to express himself with some strength, and in proportion as he approaches to the feeble, he becomes a bad writer. In all kinds of writing, however, the same degree of strength is not demanded. But the more grave and weighty any composition is, the more should a character of strength predominate in the style. Hence in history, philosophy, and solemn discourses, it is expected most. One of the most complete models of a nervous style is Demosthenes in his orations.

As every good quality in style has an extreme, when pursued to which it becomes faulty, this holds of the nervous style as well as others. Too great a study of strength, to

the neglect of the other qualities of style, is found to betray writers into a harsh manner. Harshness arises from unusual words, from forced inversions in the construction of a sentence, and too much neglect of smoothness and ease. This is reckoned the fault of some of our earliest classics in the English language, such as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Bacon, Hooker, Chillingworth, Milton in his prose works, Harrington, Cudworth, and other writers of considerable note in the days of Queen Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I. These writers had nerves and strength in a high degree, and are to this day eminent for that quality in style. But the language in their hands was exceedingly different from what it is now, and was indeed entirely formed upon the idiom and construction of the Latin in the arrangement of sentences. Hooker, for instance, begins the preface to his celebrated work of Ecclesiastical Polity, with the following sentence: "Tho for no other cause, yet for this, that posterity may know we have not loosely, through silence, permitted things to pass away as in dream, there shall be, for men's information, extant this much, concerning the present state of the church of God established among us, and their careful endeavors which would have upheld the same." Such a sentence now sounds harsh in our ears. Yet some advantages certainly attended this sort of style, and whether we have gained or

lost, upon the whole, by departing from it, may bear a question. By the freedom of arrangement which it permitted, it rendered the language susceptible of more strength, of more variety of collocation, and more harmony of period. But however this be, such a style is now obsolete, and no modern writer could adopt it without the censure of harshness and affectation. The present form which the language has assumed has, in some measure, sacrificed the study of strength to that of perspicuity and ease. Our arrangement of words has become less forcible, perhaps, but more plain and natural: and this is now understood to be the genius of our language.

The restoration of King Charles II seems to be the era of the formation of our present style. Lord Clarendon was one of the first who laid aside those frequent inversions which prevailed among writers of the former age. After him, Sir William Temple polished the language still more. But the author who, by the number and reputation of his works, formed it more than any one else, into its present state, is Dryden. Dryden began to write at the Restoration, and continued long an author both in poetry and prose. He had made the language his study, and tho he wrote hastily, and often incorrectly, and his style is not free from faults, yet there is a richness in his diction, a copiousness, ease, and

variety in his expression, which has not been surpassed by any who have come after him. Since his time, considerable attention has been paid to purity and elegance of style, but it is elegance, rather than strength, that forms the distinguishing quality of most of the good English writers. Some of them compose in a more manly and nervous manner than others; but, whether it be from the genius of our language, or from whatever other cause, it appears to me that we are far from the strength of several of the Greek and Roman authors.

Hitherto we have considered style under those characters that respect its expressiveness of an author's meaning. Let us now proceed to consider it in another view, with respect to the degree of ornament employed to beautify it. Here the style of different authors seems to rise in the following gradation: a dry, a plain, a neat, an elegant, a flowery manner. Of each of these in their order.

First, a dry manner. This excludes all ornament of every kind. Content with being understood, it has not the least aim to please, either the fancy or the ear. This is tolerable only in pure didactic writing; and even there, to make us bear it, great weight and solidity of matter is requisite, and entire perspicuity of language. Aristotle is the complete example of a dry style. Never, perhaps, was there any author who adhered so rigidly

to the strictness of a didactic manner throughout all his writings, and conveyed so much instruction, without the least approach to ornament. With the most profound genius, and extensive views, he writes like a pure intelligence, who addresses himself solely to the understanding, without making any use of the channel of the imagination. But this is a manner which deserves not to be imitated. For, altho the goodness of the matter may compensate the dryness or harshness of the style, yet is that dryness a considerable defect, as it fatigues attention, and conveys our sentiments, with disadvantage, to the reader or hearer.

A plain style rises one degree above a dry one. A writer of this character employs very little ornament of any kind, and rests almost entirely upon his sense. But, if he is at no pains to engage us by the employment of figures, musical arrangement, or any other art of writing, he studies, however, to avoid disgusting us like a dry and a harsh writer. Besides perspicuity, he pursues propriety, purity, and precision, in his language; which form one degree, and no inconsiderable one, of beauty. Liveliness, too, and force, may be consistent with a very plain style: and, therefore, such an author, if his sentiments be good, may be abundantly agreeable. The difference between a dry and plain writer is that the former is incapable of ornament, and

seems not to know what it is; the latter seeks not after it. He gives us his meaning in good language, distinct and pure; any further ornament he gives himself no trouble about, either because he thinks it unnecessary to his subject, or because his genius does not lead him to delight in it, or because it leads him to despise it.

This last was the case with Dean Swift, who may be placed at the head of those that have employed the plain style. Few writers have discovered more capacity. He treats every subject which he handles, whether serious or ludicrous, in a masterly manner. He knew, almost beyond any man, the purity, the extent, the precision of the English language; and, therefore, to such as wish to attain a pure and correct style, he is one of the most useful models. But we must not look for much ornament and grace in his language. His haughty and morose genius made him despise any embellishment of this kind as beneath his dignity. He delivers his sentiments in a plain, downright, positive manner, like one who is sure he is in the right, and is very indifferent whether you be pleased or not. His sentences are commonly negligently arranged, distinctly enough as to the sense, but without any regard to smoothness of sound, often without much regard to compactness or elegance. If a metaphor, or any other figure, chanced to render his satire more poignant,

he would, perhaps, vouchsafe to adopt it when it came in his way, but if it tended only to embellish and illustrate, he would rather throw it aside. Hence, in his serious pieces, his style often borders upon the dry and unpleasing; in his humorous ones, the plainness of his manner sets off his wit to the highest advantage. There is no froth, nor affectation in it; it seems native and unstudied; and while he hardly appears to smile himself, he makes his reader laugh heartily. To a writer of such a genius as Dean Swift, the plain style was most admirably fitted. Among our philosophical writers, Mr. Locke comes under this class; perspicuous and pure, but almost without any ornament whatever. In works which admit, or require, ever so much ornament, there are parts where the plain manner ought to predominate. But we must remember that when this is the character which a writer affects throughout his whole composition, great weight of matter, and great force of sentiment, are required, in order to keep up the reader's attention and prevent him from becoming tired of the author.

What is called a neat style comes next in order, and here we are got into the region of ornament, but that ornament not of the highest or most sparkling kind. A writer of this character shows that he does not despise the beauty of language. It is an object of his attention. But his attention is shown in the

choice of his words, and in a graceful collocation of them, rather than in any high efforts of imagination or eloquence. His sentences are always clean, and free from the incumbrance of superfluous words, of a moderate length, rather inclining to brevity than a swelling structure, closing with propriety, without any tails, or adjections dragging after the proper close. His cadence is varied, but not of the studied musical kind. His figures, if he uses any, are short and correct, rather than bold and glowing. Such a style as this may be attained by a writer who has no great powers of fancy or genius, by industry merely and careful attention to the rules of writing, and it is a style always agreeable. It imprints a character of moderate elevation on our composition, and carries a decent degree of ornament, which is not unsuitable to any subject whatever. A familiar letter, or a law paper on the driest subject, may be written with neatness, and a sermon, or a philosophical treatise, in a neat style, will be read with pleasure.

An elegant style is a character expressing a higher degree of ornament than a neat one, and, indeed, is the term usually applied to style when possessing all the virtues of ornament without any of its excesses or defects. From what has been formerly delivered, it will easily be understood that complete elegance implies great perspicuity and propriety,

purity in the choice of words, and care and dexterity in their harmonious and happy arrangement. It implies, further, the grace and beauty of imagination spread over style, as far as the subject admits it, and all the illustration which figurative language adds when properly employed. In a word, an elegant writer is one who pleases the fancy and the ear while he informs the understanding and who gives us his ideas clothed with all the beauty of expression, but not overcharged with any of its misplaced finery. In this class, therefore, we place only the first-rate writers in the language, such as Addison, Dryden, Pope, Temple, Bolingbroke, Atterbury, and a few more: writers who differ widely from one another in many of the attributes of style, but whom we now class together under the denomination of "elegant," as in the scale of "ornament," possessing nearly the same place.

When the ornaments, applied to style, are too rich and gaudy in proportion to the subject; when they return upon us too fast, and strike us either with a dazzling luster or a false brilliancy, this forms what is called a "florid" style, a term commonly used to signify the excess of ornament. In a young composer this is very pardonable. Perhaps it is even a promising symptom in young people, that their style should incline to the florid and luxuriant. Says Quintilian, "In youth

I wish to see luxuriancy of fancy appear. Much of it will be diminished by years; much will be corrected by ripening judgment; some of it by the mere practise of composition, will be worn away. Let there be only sufficient matter, at first, that can bear some pruning and lopping off. At this time of life let genius be bold and inventive, and pride itself in its efforts, tho these should not, as yet, be correct. Luxuriancy can easily be cured, but for barrenness there is no remedy." But altho the florid style may be allowed to youth, in their first essays, it must not receive the same indulgence from writers of maturer years. It is to be expected that judgment, as it ripens, should chasten imagination, and reject, as juvenile, all such ornaments as are redundant, unsuitable to the subject, or not conducive to illustrate it. Nothing can be more contemptible than that tinsel splendor of language which some writers perpetually affect. It were well if this could be ascribed to the real overflowing of a rich imagination. We should then have something to amuse us, at least, if we found little to instruct us. But the worst is, that with those frothy writers it is a luxuriancy of words, not of fancy. We see a labored attempt to rise to a splendor of composition of which they have formed to themselves some loose idea; but having no strength of genius for attaining it, they endeavor to supply the de-

fect by poetical words, by cold exclamations, by commonplace figures, and everything that has the appearance of pomp and magnificence. It has escaped these writers that sobriety in ornament is one great secret for rendering it pleasing, and that, without a foundation of good sense and solid thought, the most florid style is but a childish imposition on the public. The public, however, are but too apt to be so imposed on, at least the mob of readers, who are very ready to be caught at first with whatever is dazzling and gaudy.

I can not help thinking that it reflects more honor on the religious turn and good dispositions of the present age than on the public taste, that Mr. Harvey's Meditations have had so great a currency. The pious and benevolent heart which is always displayed in them, and the lively fancy which on some occasions appears, justly merited applause; but the perpetual glitter of expression, the swollen imagery and strained description which abound in them, are ornaments of a false kind. I would, therefore, advise students of oratory to imitate Mr. Harvey's piety rather than his style, and in all compositions of a serious kind to turn their attention, as Mr. Pope says, "from sounds to things, from fancy to the heart." Admonitions of this kind I have already had occasion to give and may hereafter repeat them, as I conceive

nothing more incumbent on me than to take every opportunity of cautioning my readers against the affected and frivolous use of ornament, and, instead of that slight and superficial taste in writing, which I apprehend to be at present too fashionable, to introduce, as far as my endeavors can avail, a taste for more solid thought and more manly simplicity in style.

CHAPTER VII

GENERAL CHARACTERS OF STYLE —SIMPLE, AFFECTED, VEHEMENT —DIRECTIONS FOR FORMING A PROPER STYLE

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HAVING entered, in the last chapter, on the consideration of the general characters of style, I treated of the concise and diffuse, the nervous and feeble manner. I considered style also with relation to the different degrees of ornament employed to beautify it, in which view the manner of different authors rises according to the following gradation: dry, plain, neat, elegant, flowery.

I am next to treat of style under another character, one of great importance in writing, and which requires to be accurately examined, that of simplicity, or a natural style, as distinguished from affectation. Simplicity, applied to writing, is a term very frequently used, but, like many other critical terms, often used loosely and without precision. This has been owing chiefly to the different meanings given to the word "simplicity," which, therefore, it will be necessary here to distin-

guish, and to show in what sense it is a proper attribute of style. We may remark four different acceptations in which it is taken.

The first is, simplicity of composition, as opposed to too great a variety of parts. Horace's precept refers to this:

> Then learn the wand'ring humor to control,
> And keep one equal tenor through the whole.

This is the simplicity of plan in a tragedy, as distinguished from double plots and crowded incidents; the simplicity of the Iliad or Æneid, in opposition to the digressions of Lucan and the scattered tales of Ariosto; the simplicity of Grecian architecture, in opposition to the irregular variety of the Gothic. In this sense, simplicity is the same with unity.

The second sense is, simplicity of thought, as opposed to refinement. Simple thoughts are what arise naturally, what the occasion or the subject suggest unsought, and what, when once suggested, are easily apprehended by all. Refinement in writing expresses a less natural and obvious train of thought, and which it required a peculiar turn of genius to pursue; within certain bounds very beautiful, but when carried too far, approaching to intricacy, and hurting us by the appearance of being recherché, or far sought. Thus we would naturally say that Mr. Parnell is a poet of far greater simplicity, in his turn

of thought, than Mr. Cowley: Cicero's thoughts on moral subjects are natural; Seneca's, too refined and labored. In these two senses of simplicity, when it is opposed either to variety of parts or to refinement of thought, it has no proper relation to style.

There is a third sense of simplicity, in which it has respect to style, and stands opposed to too much ornament or pomp of language; as when we say, Mr. Locke is a simple, Mr. Harvey a florid, writer; and it is in this sense that the "simplex," the "tenue," or "subtile genus dicendi," is understood by Cicero and Quintilian. The simple style, in this sense, coincides with the plain or the neat style which I before mentioned, and, therefore, requires no further illustration.

But there is a fourth sense of simplicity, also respecting style, but not respecting the degree of ornament employed so much as the easy and natural manner in which our language expresses our thoughts. This is quite different from the former sense of the word just now mentioned, in which simplicity was equivalent to plainness; whereas, in this sense, it is compatible with the highest ornament. Homer, for instance, possesses this simplicity in the greatest perfection, and yet no writer has more ornament and beauty. This simplicity, which is what we are now to consider, stands opposed, not to ornament, but to affectation of ornament, or appear-

ance of labor about our style, and it is a distinguishing excellency in writing.

A writer of simplicity expresses himself in such a manner that every one thinks he could have written in the same way. Horace describes it:

From well-known tales such fictions would I raise,
As all might hope to imitate with ease;
Yet, while they strive the same success to gain,
Should find their labors and their hopes in vain.

There are no marks of art in his expression; it seems the very language of nature; you see in the style, not the writer and his labor, but the man, in his own natural character. He may be rich in his expression; he may be full of figures and of fancy, but these flow from him without effort, and he appears to write in this manner, not because he has studied it, but because it is the manner of expression most natural to him. A certain degree of negligence, also, is not inconsistent with this character of style, and even not ungraceful in it; for too minute an attention to words is foreign to it. Cicero says (Orat. No. 77), "Let this style have a certain softness and ease, which shall characterize a negligence, not unpleasing in an author, who appears to be more solicitous about the thought than the expression." This is the great advantage of simplicity of style, that, like sim-

plicity of manners, it shows us a man's sentiments and turn of mind laid open without disguise. More studied and artificial manners of writing, however beautiful, have always this disadvantage, that they exhibit an author in form, like a man at court, where the splendor of dress and the ceremonial of behavior, conceal those peculiarities which distinguish one man from another. But reading an author of simplicity is like conversing with a person of distinction at home, and with ease, where we find natural manners and a marked character.

The highest degree of this simplicity is exprest by a French term, to which we have none that fully answers in our language, naïveté. It is not easy to give a precise idea of the import of this word. It always expresses a discovery of character. I believe the best account of it is given by a French critic, M. Marmontel, who explains it thus: that sort of amiable ingenuity, or undisguised openness, which seems to give us some degree of superiority over the person who shows it; a certain infantine simplicity, which we love in our hearts, but which displays some features of the character that we think we could have art enough to hide, and which, therefore, always leads us to smile at the person who discovers this character. La Fontaine, in his Fables, is given as the great example of such naïveté. This, however, is to be understood

as descriptive of a particular species only of simplicity.

With respect to simplicity, in general, we may remark that the ancient original writers are always the most eminent for it. This happens from a plain reason, that they wrote from the dictates of natural genius, and were not formed upon the labors and writings of others, which is always in hazard of producing affectation. Hence, among the Greek writers we have more models of a beautiful simplicity than among the Roman. Homer, Hesiod, Anacreon, Theocritus, Herodotus, and Xenophon, are all distinguished for it. Among the Romans also we have some writers of this character, particularly Terence, Lucretius, Phoedrus, and Julius Cæsar. The following passage of Terence's Andria is a beautiful instance of simplicity of manner in description:

Meanwhile the funeral proceeds; we follow;
Come to the sepulcher: the body's placed
Upon the pile; lamented; whereupon
This sister I was speaking of, all wild,
Ran to the flames with peril of her life.
There! there! the frighted Pamphilus betrays
His well-dissembled and long-hidden love;
Runs up, and takes her round the waist, and cries,
Oh! my Glycerium! what is it you do?
Why, why, endeavor to destroy yourself?
Then she, in such manner that you thence
Might easily perceive their long, long love,
Threw herself back into his arms, and wept,
Oh, how familiarly!

All the words here are remarkably happy and elegant, and convey a most lively picture of the scene described; while, at the same time, the style appears wholly artless and unlabored. Let us next consider some English writers who come under this class.

Simplicity is the great beauty of Archbishop Tillotson's manner. Tillotson has long been admired as an eloquent writer and a model for preaching. But his eloquence, if we can call it such, has been often misunderstood. For, if we include in the idea of eloquence, vehemence and strength, picturesque description, glowing figures, or correct arrangement of sentences, in all these parts of oratory, the Archbishop is exceedingly deficient. His style is always pure, indeed, and perspicuous, but careless and remiss, too often feeble and languid; little beauty in the construction of his sentences, which are frequently suffered to drag unharmoniously; seldom any attempt toward strength or sublimity. But, notwithstanding these defects, such a constant vein of good sense and piety runs through his works, such an earnest and serious manner, and so much useful instruction conveyed in a style so pure, natural, and unaffected, as will justly recommend him to high regard as long as the English language remains; not, indeed, as a model of the highest eloquence, but as a simple and amiable writer, whose manner is strongly expressive

of great goodness and worth. I observed before that simplicity of manner may be consistent with some degree of negligence in style, and it is only the beauty of that simplicity which makes the negligence of such writers seem graceful. But, as appears in the Archbishop, negligence may sometimes be carried so far as to impair the beauty of simplicity and make it border on a flat and languid manner.

Sir William Temple is another remarkable writer in the style of simplicity. In point of ornament and correctness, he rises a degree above Tillotson; tho for correctness he is not in the highest rank. All is easy and flowing in him; he is exceedingly harmonious; smoothness, and what may be called amenity, are the distinguishing characters of his manner; relaxing sometimes, as such a manner will naturally do, into a prolix and remiss style. No writer whatever has stamped upon his style a more lively impression of his own character. In reading his works we seem engaged in conversation with him; we become thoroughly acquainted with him, not merely as an author, but as a man, and contract a friendship for him. He may be classed as standing in the middle between a negligent simplicity and the highest degree of ornament which this character of style admits.

Of the latter of these, the highest, most correct, and ornamented degree of the simple

manner, Mr. Addison is, beyond a doubt, in the English language, the most perfect example; and, therefore, tho not without some faults, he is, on the whole, the safest model for imitation and the freest from considerable defects, which the language affords. Perspicuous and pure he is in the highest degree; his precision, indeed, not very great, yet nearly as great as the subjects which he treats of require: the construction of his sentences easy, agreeable, and commonly very musical; carrying a character of smoothness, more than of strength. In figurative language, he is rich, particularly in similes and metaphors, which are so employed as to render his style splendid without being gaudy. There is not the least affectation in his manner, we see no marks of labor, nothing forced or constrained; but great elegance joined with great ease and simplicity. He is, in particular, distinguished by a character of modesty and of politeness, which appears in all his writings. No author has a more popular and insinuating manner, and the great regard which he everywhere shows for virtue and religion, recommends him highly. If he fails in anything, it is in want of strength and precision, which renders his manner, tho perfectly suited to such essays as he writes in the *Spectator*, not altogether a proper model for any of the higher and more elaborate kinds of composition. Tho the public have ever

done much justice to his merit, yet the nature of his merit has not always been seen in its true light; for, tho his poetry be elegant, he certainly bears a higher rank among the prose writers than he is entitled to among the poets; and in prose his humor is of a much higher and more original strain than his philosophy. The character of Sir Roger de Coverley discovers more genius than the critique on Milton.

Such authors as those whose characters I have been giving, one is never tired of reading. There is nothing in their manner that strains or fatigues our thoughts: we are pleased, without being dazzled by their luster. So powerful is the charm of simplicity in an author of real genius, that it atones for many defects, and reconciles us to many a careless expression. Hence, in all the most excellent authors, both in prose and verse, the simple and natural manner may be always remarked, altho other beauties be predominant and this form not their peculiar and distinguishing character. Thus, Milton is simple in the midst of all his grandeur; and Demosthenes, in the midst of all his vehemence. To grave and solemn writings, simplicity of manner adds the more venerable air. This has often been remarked as the prevailing character throughout all the sacred Scriptures, and indeed no other character of style was so much suited to the dignity of inspiration.

Of authors who, notwithstanding many excellences, have rendered their style much less beautiful by want of simplicity, I can not give a more beautiful example than Lord Shaftesbury. This is an author on whom I have made observations several times before, and shall now take leave of him with giving his general character under this head. Considerable merit, doubtless, he has. His works might be read with profit for the moral philosophy which they contain, had he not filled them with so many oblique and invidious insinuations against the Christian religion, thrown out, too, with so much spleen and satire as do no honor to his memory, either as an author or a man. His language has many beauties. It is firm and supported in an uncommon degree; it is rich and musical. No English author, as I formerly showed, has attended so much to the regular construction of his sentences, both with respect to propriety, and with respect to cadence. All this gives so much elegance and pomp to his language that there is no wonder it should have been highly admired by some. It is greatly hurt, however, by perpetual stiffness and affectation. This is its capital fault. His Lordship can express nothing with simplicity. He seems to have considered it as vulgar and beneath the dignity of a man of quality to speak like other men. Hence he is ever in buskins, and drest out with magnificent ele-

gance. In every sentence we see marks of labor and art; nothing of that ease which expresses a sentiment coming natural and warm from the heart. Of figures and ornament of every kind he is exceedingly fond, sometimes happy in them, but his fondness for them is too visible, and having once laid hold of some metaphor or allusion that pleased him, he knows not how to part with it. What is most wonderful, he was a profest admirer of simplicity, is always extolling it in the ancients, and censuring the moderns for the want of it, tho he departs from it himself as far as any one modern whatever. Lord Shaftesbury possest delicacy and refinement of taste to a degree that we may call excessive and sickly; but he had little warmth of passion, few strong or vigorous feelings, and the coldness of his character led him to that artificial and stately manner which appears in his writings. He was fonder of nothing that of wit and raillery, but he is far from being happy in it. He attempts it often, but always awkwardly; he is stiff, even in his pleasantry; and laughs in form, like an author, and not like a man.

From the account which I have given of Lord Shaftesbury's manner, it may easily be imagined that he would mislead many who blindly admired him. Nothing is more dangerous to the tribe of imitators than an author who, with many imposing beauties, has also

some very considerable blemishes. This is fully exemplified in Mr. Blackwall of Aberdeen, the author of the Life of Homer, the "Letters on Mythology," and the "Court of Augustus"; a writer of considerable learning, and of ingenuity also, but infected with an extravagant love of an artificial style, and of that parade of language which distinguishes the Shaftesburean manner.

Having now said so much to recommend simplicity, or the easy and natural manner of writing, and having pointed out the defects of an opposite manner; in order to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary for me to observe that it is very possible for an author to write simply and yet not beautifully. One may be free from affectation, and not have merit. The beautiful simplicity supposes an author to possess real genius, to write with solidity, purity, and liveliness of imagination. In this case, the simplicity or unaffectedness of his manner is the crowning ornament; it heightens every other beauty, it is the dress of nature, without which all beauties are imperfect. But if mere unaffectedness were sufficient to constitute the beauty of style, weak, trifling, and dull writers might often lay claim to this beauty. And, accordingly, we frequently meet with pretended critics who extol the dullest writers on account of what they call the "chaste simplicity of their manner," which, in truth, is

no other than the absence of every ornament, through the mere want of genius and imagination. We must distinguish, therefore, between that simplicity which accompanies true genius, and which is perfectly compatible with every proper ornament of style, and that which is no other than a careless and slovenly manner. Indeed, the distinction is easily made from the effect produced. The one never fails to interest the reader; the other is insipid and tiresome.

I proceed to mention one other manner or character of style, different from any that I have yet spoken of, which may be distinguished by the name of the "vehement." This always implies strength, and is not, by any means, inconsistent with simplicity, but in its predominant character is distinguishable from either the strong or the simple manner. It has a peculiar ardor, it is a glowing style; the language of a man whose imagination and passions are heated and strongly affected by what he writes, who is, therefore, negligent of lesser graces, but pours himself forth with the rapidity and fulness of a torrent. It belongs to the higher kinds of oratory, and indeed is rather expected from a man who is speaking, than from one who is writing in his closet. The orations of Demosthenes furnish the full and perfect example of this species of style.

Among English writers, the one who has

most of this character, tho mixed, indeed, with several defects, is Lord Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke was formed by nature to be a factious leader, the demagog of a popular assembly. Accordingly, the style that runs through all his political writings is that of one declaiming with heat, rather than writing with deliberation. He abounds in rhetorical figures, and pours himself forth with great impetuosity. He is copious to a fault, places the same thought before us in many different views, but generally with life and ardor. He is bold, rather than correct; a torrent that flows strong, but often muddy. His sentences are varied as to length and shortness; inclining, however, most to long periods, sometimes including parentheses, and frequently crowding and heaping a multitude of things upon one another, as naturally happens in the warmth of speaking. In the choice of his words there is great felicity and precision. In exact construction of sentences he is much inferior to Lord Shaftesbury, but greatly superior to him in life and ease. Upon the whole, his merit as a writer would have been very considerable if his matter had equaled his style. But while we find many things to commend in the latter; in the former, as I before remarked, we can hardly find anything to commend. In his reasonings, for the most part, he is flimsy and false; in his political writings, factious; in what he calls his philo-

sophical ones, irreligious and sophistical in the highest degree.

I shall insist no longer on the different manners of writers, or the general characters of style. Some other, besides those which I have mentioned, might be pointed out, but I am sensible that it is very difficult to separate such general considerations of the style of authors from their peculiar turn of sentiment, which it is not my business at present to criticize. Conceited writers, for instance, discover their spirit so much in their composition that it imprints on their style a character of pertness, tho I confess it is difficult to say whether this can be classed among the attributes of style, or rather is to be ascribed entirely to the thought. In whatever class we rank it, all appearances of it ought to be avoided with care, as a most disgusting blemish in writing. Under the general heads which I have considered, I have taken an opportunity of giving the character of many of the eminent classics in the English language.

From what I have said on this subject, it may be inferred that to determine among all these different manners of writing, what is precisely the best, is neither easy nor necessary. Style is a field that admits of great latitude. Its qualities in different authors may be very unlike, and yet in them all beautiful. Room must be left here for genius, for that particular determination which

every one receives from nature to one manner of expression more than another. Some general qualities, indeed, there are of importance as should always, in every kind of composition, be kept in view, and some defects we should always study to avoid. An ostentatious, a feeble, a harsh, or an obscure style, for instance, are always faults; and perspicuity, strength, neatness, and simplicity, are beauties to be always aimed at. But as to the mixture of all, or the degree of predominancy of any one of these good qualities for forming our peculiar distinguishing manner, no precise rules can be given, nor will I venture to point out any one model as absolutely perfect.

It will be more to the purpose that I conclude these dissertations upon style with a few directions concerning the proper method of attaining a good style in general, leaving the particular character of that style to be either formed by the subject on which we write, or prompted by the bent of genius.

The first direction which I give for this purpose is, to study clear ideas on the subject about which we are to write or speak. This may at first seem to have small relation to style; but its relation is, however, close. The foundation of all good style is good sense accompanied with a lively imagination. The style and thoughts of a writer are so intimately connected that, as I have several times hinted, it is frequently hard to distinguish

them. Wherever the impressions of things upon our minds are faint and indistinct, or perplexed and confused, our style in treating of such things will infallibly be so too. Whereas, what we conceive clearly and feel strongly, we shall naturally express with clearness and with strength. This, then, we may be assured, is a capital rule as to style, to think closely of the subject till we have attained a full and distinct view of the matter which we are to clothe in words, till we become warm and interested in it; then, and not till then, shall we find expression begin to flow. Generally speaking, the best and most proper expressions are those which a clear view of the subject suggests, without much labor or inquiry after them. This is Quintilian's observation, "The most proper words for the most part adhere to the thoughts which are to be exprest by them, and may be discovered as by their own light. But we hunt after them, as if they were hidden and only to be found in a corner. Hence, instead of conceiving the words to lie near the subject, we go in quest of them to some other quarter, and endeavor to give force to the expressions we have found out."

In the second place, in order to form a good style, the frequent practise of composing is indispensably necessary. Many rules concerning style I have delivered, but no rules will answer the end without exer-

cise and habit. At the same time, it is not every sort of composing that will improve style. This is so far from being the case, that by frequent, careless, and hasty composition, we shall acquire certainly a very bad style; we shall have more trouble afterward in unlearning faults, and correcting negligences, than if we had not been accustomed to composition at all. In the beginning, therefore, we ought to write slowly, and with much care. Let the facility and speed of writing be the fruit of longer practise. Quintilian says, "I enjoin that such as are beginning the practise of composition, write slowly, and with anxious deliberation. Their great object at first should be to write as well as possible; practise will enable them to write speedily. By degrees matter will offer itself still more readily; words will be at hand; composition will flow; everything, as in the arrangement of a well-ordered family, will present itself in its proper place. The sum of the whole is this: by hasty composition we shall never acquire the art of composing well; by writing well, we shall come to write speedily."

We must observe, however, that there may be an extreme, in too great and anxious a care about words. We must not retard the course of thought, nor cool the heat of imagination, by pausing too long on every word we employ. There is, on certain occasions,

a glow of composition which should be kept up, if we hope to express ourselves happily, tho at the expense of allowing some inadvertencies to pass. A more severe examination of these must be left to be the work of correction. For, if the practise of composition be useful, the laborious work of correcting is no less so; is, indeed, absolutely necessary to our reaping any benefit from the habit of composition. What we have written should be laid by for some little time, till the ardor of composition be past, till the fondness for the expressions we have used be worn off, and the expressions themselves be forgotten; and then reviewing our work with a cool and critical eye, as if it were the performance of another, we shall discern many imperfections which at first escaped us. This is the season for pruning redundancies; for examining the arrangement of sentences; for attending to the juncture and connecting particles; and bringing style into a regular, correct, and supported form. This "limae labor" must be submitted to by all who would communicate their thoughts with proper advantage to others, and some practise in it will soon sharpen their eye to the most necessary objects of attention, and render it a much more easy and practicable work than might at first be imagined.

In the third place, with respect to the assistance that is to be gained from the writings

of others, it is obvious that we ought to render ourselves well acquainted with the style of the best authors. This is requisite both in order to form a just taste in style, and to supply us with a full stock of words on every subject. In reading authors, with a view to style, attention should be given to the peculiarities of their different manners, and in this, and previous chapters, I have endeavored to suggest several things that may be useful in this view. I know no exercise that will be found more useful for acquiring a proper style than to translate some passage from an eminent English author into our own words. What I mean is, to take, for instance, some page of one of Mr. Addison's *Spectators,* and read it carefully over two or three times; till we have got a firm hold of the thoughts contained in it; then to lay aside the book and attempt to write out the passage from memory, in the best way we can; and having done so, next to open the book, and compare what we have written with the style of the author. Such an exercise will, by comparison, show us where the defects of our style lie; will lead us to the proper attentions for rectifying them; and, among the different ways in which the same thought may be exprest, will make us perceive that which is the most beautiful.

In the fourth place, however, I must caution, at the same time, against a servile imi-

tation of any author whatever. This is always dangerous. It hampers genius; it is likely to produce a stiff manner; and those who are given to close imitation, generally imitate an author's faults as well as his beauties. No man will ever become a good writer, or speaker, who has not some degree of confidence to follow his own genius. We ought to beware, in particular, of adopting any author's noted phrases, or transcribing passages from him. Such a habit will prove fatal to all genuine composition. Infinitely better it is to have something that is our own, tho of moderate beauty, than to affect to shine in borrowed ornaments, which will at last betray the utter poverty of our genius. On these heads of composing, correcting, reading, and imitating, I advise every student of oratory to consult what Quintilian has delivered in the Tenth Book of his Institutions, where he will find a variety of excellent observations and directions that well deserve attention.

In the fifth place, it is an obvious, but material rule, with respect to style, that we always study to adapt it to the subject, and also to the capacity of our hearers, if we are to speak in public. Nothing merits the name of eloquent or beautiful, which is not suited to the occasion and to the persons to whom it is addrest. It is to the last degree awkward and absurd to attempt a poetical, florid

style on occasions when it should be our business only to argue and reason, or to speak with elaborate pomp of expression before persons who comprehend nothing of it, and who can only stare at our unseasonable magnificence. These are defects not so much in point of style as, what is much worse, in point of common sense. When we begin to write or speak, we ought previously to fix in our minds a clear conception of the end to be aimed at; to keep this steadily in our view, and to suit our style to it. If we do not sacrifice to this great object every ill-timed ornament that may occur to our fancy, we are unpardonable; and tho children and fools may admire, men of sense will laugh at us and our style.

In the last place, I can not conclude the subject without this admonition, that, in any case, and on any occasion, attention to style must not engross us so much as to detract from a higher degree of attention to the thoughts. Says the great Roman critic, "To your expression be attentive; but about your matter be solicitous." A direction the more necessary as the present taste of the age in writing seems to lean more to style than to thought. It is much easier to dress up trivial and common sentiments with some beauty of expression than to afford a fund of vigorous, ingenious, and useful thoughts. The latter requires true genius; the former may be at-

tained by industry, with the help of very superficial parts. Hence we find so many writers frivolously rich in style, but wretchedly poor in sentiment. The public ear is now so much accustomed to a correct and ornamented style, that no writer can with safety neglect the study of it. But he is a contemptible one who does not look to something beyond it; who does not lay the chief stress upon his matter, and employ such ornaments of style to recommend it as are manly, not foppish. Says the writer whom I have so often quoted, "A higher spirit ought to animate those who study eloquence. They ought to consult the health and soundness of the whole body, rather than bend their attention to such trifling objects as paring the nails and dressing the hair. Let ornament be manly and chaste, without effeminate gaiety, or artificial coloring; let it shine with the glow of health and strength."

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